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The portrait you draw of her is a speaking one. I see her now, with her light hair and her big kitchen-apron tied around her neck, holding in the right hand a cooking-spoon, and in the left a pretty gilt-edged 18mo, one eye watching a saucepan, and the other shedding tears over the misfortunes of Egmont and Clärchen. I am truly obliged to you for your kind intentions ; but, are you quite sure that I am not already married, or wellnigh so? And then, here is the point: you assure me that your young friend has azure eyes! Ah! madame, azure eyes! Thereby hangs a tale, which I must relate to you; you are discreet, and will keep it to yourself:

I.

I WAS about twenty-five years old, and for three years had been studying painting in the studio of a master whom you know, when I received a letter from my father, a good Burgundy cooper, lately retired from business, which obliged me to start for Beaune in great haste. My valise was soon strapped. To tell the truth, I was uneasy, and not well satisfied with my conduct; I dreaded the paternal face and frowns. Not that I had any very heavy misdeeds on my conscience; I was passionately fond of painting, and could work for three weeks consecutively without indulging in the least recreation; but there were times when I would break loose, and commit two or three big follies all in one breath.

What makes the pleasures of youth so expensive is chiefly vanity. I was crazy to have people speak of me, and liked to stun the fellows in the pit; but this admiration of my friends cost me considerable money, and my finances were generally at a low ebb. I had not yet meditated over the maxim of that wiseacre, who said, "There is so great a difference between the man whose fortune is already made and him who has it yet to make that they cannot be regarded as creatures of the same species."

On arriving at home, I found my father in a little paved court-yard where he liked to smoke his pipe. Folding his arms, he scrutinised for a while in silence my rather showy toilet, which was, to be sure, not that of a poor studio devil, and gave three shakes of his big Burgundian head, whose bald spots shone like the staves of his casks; then, perching himself upon a barrel—"Tony Flamerin, my only son," said

he to me, "stand there before me in the sun, and look down on the ground ; you will see there the shadow of a fool."

"There are pardonable follies," I replied, with considerable assurance. "Mine will soon come to an end."

"Yes, on the straw, or in the poor-house," retorted he drily, sending forth, one after the other, big puffs from his pipe ; then, raising his voice—"Tony Flamerin, you wish to become a painter. You stupidly fancy yourself a man of talent ; the only talent I know you to possess is that of squandering your property. It is the fault of your poor mother. God rest her soul ! She had made up her mind that you were too delicate, that your hands were too white to become a cooper, like your good-man father. Well ! so we send young master in apprenticeship to a wholesale merchant of Lyons, who dismisses him at the end of the year for besmearing his memorandum-books with landscapes. Meanwhile, the worthy woman dies, leaving to this good-for-nothing fellow her whole personal fortune, twenty-eight thousand five hundred francs ; and I, wearied out with useless remonstrances, allow this rare genius to go and study painting at Paris. . . . Tony, look again at your shadow, and tell me whether it is not indeed the shadow of a fool ! Tony, just count up, if you please, how much there is left of those twenty-eight thousand five hundred francs of your late mother's."

I looked at my shadow : it was not that of a fool ; it had a kind of contrite air, and seemed much troubled in its conscience.

"Tony," continued he, "you have spent three years in Paris ; you have not earned a copper there ; on the other hand, you have spent sixteen thousand francs, without mentioning the centimes."

"Two thousand the first year," I said ; "four thousand the second, eight thousand the third—a geometrical pro-

gression. I confess it was going it rather strong, but then ?—”

I involuntarily smacked my lips and smiled, for I could not help recalling at that moment a certain pretty, sprightly face. . . . I shook my head, the face disappeared as through a trap-door, and I saw nothing before me but the big, round eyes of my father, flashing with rage.

“I really believe you are jesting !” cried he, throwing his pipe on the ground, where it broke into pieces.

“Heaven forbid ! I am never more serious then when I look as if I were laughing.” And I approached him to embrace him. He pushed me off. However, I confessed my faults with so much humility, and made so many promises to mend my ways, that he softened down.

“Enough of these grimaces and protestations !” said he. “I have a proposition to communicate to you, which, if you refuse, all shall be over between us ; I shall never want to see you again.”

I begged him to explain himself, and received the following information : My uncle Gideon Flamerin had emigrated twelve years previous to America, where he had made a fortune in a banking-house, and become a person of note. Having remained a bachelor, and his solitude growing irksome, he wrote to my father, offering to take me to his house, to see to my success in life, in short to adopt me as his son, his partner, his successor ; three qualifications which made me shudder. He only required that, before embarking for New York, I should spend a few months in Hamburg and London to learn German and English. The postscript of his letter appeared to me still more astounding ; it ran as follows : “My nephew Tony is, it appears, a sort of hare-brained fellow. No great harm ; youth must sow its wild-oats ; but there may be too much of a good thing. Get him a wife. There is nothing like it to stop the gallop of a young man

and bring him to a moderate pace. If Tony can find at Beaune or Hamburg a nice girl who would consent to become my daughter-in-law, I shall be happy to welcome her at my house."

I could contain myself no longer ; the mere mention of a wife exasperated me. "Make a husband of me—oh ! that is too much !" I cried. "The letter is anything but welcome, and the postscript is odious. The deuce ! if you hand people a glass of wine they do not relish, you should at least see that there are no flies at the bottom."

"Think it over," cried my father, whose wrath was kindled afresh. "Your uncle offers you a fortune ; you may sacrifice it to your oil-painting, if you like, only I tell you one thing—don't depend any longer on me. I commenced life with nothing ; by dint of hard work I amassed an income of four thousand francs, and I tell you that, as sure as I am a Burgundian, I mean to live long and comfortably ; I am just cut out for that. You will have nothing from me till you have buried me ; depend on that"—striking his forehead—"it's written here !" The gesture was expressive, and left me in no doubt as to his earnestness. "Tomorrow," he added, "I shall settle with you, and shall hand over to you what remains of your mother's bequest—twelve thousand-odd francs, for I do not mean to be your banker any longer, and to have to protect your sous against yourself. You may make a mouthful of it ! When you have no choice left between New York and the hospital, perhaps you will consent to taste your uncle's wine ; you may yet have to swallow the glassful and the flies at the bottom too. Amen !"

Had I followed my inclinations, I should have returned post-haste to Paris ; but, notwithstanding my uncle's bad opinion of me, I was not quite such a hare-brained fellow as he thought. I did not believe in halfway artists—a painter without talent seemed to me always some sort of a fool. Al-

though I had considerable faith in my genius, I had also at times my misgivings. The profoundest convictions have their days of weakness. After having turned the matter over in my mind—"There may be," thought I, "some means of coming to terms both with Providence and my good uncle Gideon, and, since he wishes me to go to Germany and learn German, I will go there; it will not hinder me from painting. A year hence I shall know who I am and what I am worth." In consequence of this reasoning, I determined to go and study, not at Hamburg, but at Dresden, for I could not live without a picture-gallery.

I was not long in making up my mind; my natural vivacity cannot brook delays. I at once communicated my intentions to my father, keeping, in the meantime, certain thoughts to myself. He rewarded me for this act of submission by a vigorous thump on the back, and by draining his wine-cellar during the fortnight I spent with him, so as to keep me in good-humour. One morning I bade him farewell, and took my departure, carrying with me his blessing in my heart, and thirteen thousand francs in my pocket—a considerable surprise to the latter.

Heaven, meanwhile, had decreed that I should learn German before reaching Germany. I travelled from Beaune to Geneva in company with a corpulent gentleman, middle-aged, with a fresh and rosy complexion, and a pleasing and dignified countenance. His name was Benedict Holdenis. He had a certain unctuous way of expressing himself about things in general, and especially about improving the condition of the suffering classes, about Kindergartens, and the necessity of developing early in little girls moral reflection and the sentiment of the beautiful. I fancied at first that this philanthropist was some Protestant ecclesiastic; but he informed me that he was a merchant, and that he had left Elberfeld ten years before to establish himself at Geneva,

where he conducted a large hardware business. His conversation, I confess, was rather too high-flown for me, still I pretended to enjoy it—I felt under such great obligations to him for having taken me, on the strength of my cravat and good looks, for a young nobleman travelling for his pleasure. He asked me, in a discreet tone, where my father's property was situated. I told him the truth, but with so much art in my explanations that it in no wise diminished the favourable opinion he had formed of me. Not to conceal anything from you, I must own also that I sought and found an opportunity to open before him my pocket-book, the obesity of which called forth an exclamation very flattering to me; he did not suspect that, like the Gascon philosopher, I carried all I was worth with me. O youth! what a simpleton thou art! In short, we became such good friends that on leaving the train he offered me his services, gave me his address, and made me promise to come to see him if I should make any stay at Geneva.

My first intention had been to continue my journey without stopping; but who does what he wishes? In leaving the waiting-room of the railway-station, I ran against a specimen of real gentry—an American, six feet high, named Harris—whose acquaintance, as an idler, I had made in Paris. He used to come at rare intervals to the studio, to study painting at his leisure moments; but his chief occupation was to spend his income and while away the time, in which attempt, however, he scarcely ever succeeded. He could find nothing very entertaining in Geneva; on beholding me, he raised his big arms to heaven, and blessed Providence for sending his spleen so unhoped-for a prey. Persuaded by his eloquence, I went to engage a room at the Hôtel des Bergues, where he was staying; and for two weeks we did nothing from morning till night but sail on the lake, where more than once we were in danger of capsizing. We spent our

nights in playing interminable games of piquet, drinking beer, and throwing the empty mugs at each other's head.

One day we took a long ride on horseback. I was riding a chestnut full of pluck and fire ; and Harris, who was an adept in horsemanship, and rather chary of his compliments, having deigned to praise my talents in that direction, I flattered myself that I was cutting something of a figure in the world. In the evening we stopped at a country inn for refreshments. At the extremity of the harbour, where we had taken our seats, sat a family, just finishing a rural meal. A young girl of about eighteen, apparently the oldest of the children, stood facing me at the table, evidently fulfilling the duties of major-domo, for she was carving a fowl. To protect herself against the sun that here and there gleamed through the foliage, she had covered her head with a kerchief, the beautiful colour of which first attracted my attention, but the face underneath it interested me far more. Harris asked me jestingly what I could find to admire in so ugly a creature ; but I gave him to understand that he was no judge in the matter.

This ugly creature, as he called her, was a brunette ; rather short than tall, with chestnut hair, eyes of the clearest and sweetest blue, just like two turquoises, and a beauty-mole on the left cheek. She was neither handsome nor pretty ; her nose was too heavy, her chin too square ; her mouth too large, her lips too thick ; but she had, on the other hand, that peculiar and indescribable charm which bewitches : a nectarine complexion ; cheeks like those fruits one longs to bite into ; a face unlike any other ; an ingenuous air, a caressing look, an angelic smile, and a musical voice. She had an adorable way of carving fowls. Her four younger sisters, and two little brothers, were holding up their plates to her, opening their beaks like so many little chickens waiting for their food. She helped them all

to their satisfaction. Her father, who had his back to me, called to her in a honeyed voice and German accent, which sounded strangely familiar to me, "Meta, you keep nothing for yourself, my dear!" She replied in German, and she must have said something very sweet, for he cried, "*Allerliebste!*" (charming) an exclamation I had no need of going to Dresden to understand. At the same time he turned towards me, and I recognised the venerable face of my travelling-companion. M. Holdenis, who was henceforth to live in my memory as the father of the most charming ugly creature I had ever met, remembered me at once, and, as I advanced towards him, received me with open arms. He asked permission to introduce me to Madame Holdenis, a large, stout woman, round as a ball, rosy, ugly, and not in the least charming. I excused myself for not having called on him before, and did not leave till I had obtained an invitation to dinner for the next day.

"Look here!" said Harris, somewhat sulkily, when we had again mounted our horses, "what do you want with these Holdenises?"

"I mean to paint the portrait of their daughter," I replied; "I have never had my imagination so inflamed as it was this evening."

"You are insane!" cried he, striking his horse a sharp blow. "The girl, to be sure, is good-looking enough; she has a pretty hand, a pretty form, fine arms, and through her chemisette I could see the beginning of superb shoulders. I might even add, to please you, that her bust may some day develop into fine proportions; but I assure you that all the rest is not worth a straw."

"And I tell you, my good friend," I retorted, "that you have no artist's eye. Beauty is too indefinable a thing to express. Mademoiselle Meta Holdenis will some day be an object of great admiration."

M. Holdenis lived in a comfortable country-house, five minutes' walk from the town. The place was called Florissant, and the house "Mon-Nid;" you will see by-and-by that I have had good reasons for remembering these names. I was punctual at the rendezvous, despite Harris, who had sworn to make me miss it. M. Holdenis welcomed me with the most amiable cordiality. He immediately collected his seven children, placed them like organ-pipes all in a row, according to age and size, and gave me their names. I had to listen to the story of their precocious exploits, their winning ways, their natural wit. I expressed my delight and put Madame Holdenis into ecstasy. "They are the very children of their mother!" said the husband—and, looking lovingly at her, chivalrously kissed both her very red hands.

During this time, the busy Meta came and went, lighting the lamps, arranging bouquets to adorn the mantel-piece, gliding into the dining-room to help the servant in setting the table, and from thence darting into the kitchen to give an eye to the roast. Her father told me that they called her, in the house, little mouse, "*das Mäuschen*," because she moved about so noiselessly; she had the secret of being everywhere at once.

The meal seemed to me delicious, for had she not had a hand in it? But what appeared still more admirable was the appetite of my host; I was, indeed, afraid he would hurt himself: all went off well, however; we took our coffee on the veranda, in the starlight—the honeysuckle and jasmines intoxicating us with their perfume. "What matters it whether one lives in a palace or in a hut?" remarked Monsieur Holdenis to me, "provided one keeps a window open to a bit of blue sky?"

Having called back his progeny, he arranged them in a circle and made them sing psalms. Meta beat the time for

the young concert-singers, and at times gave them the keynote ; she had a nightingale-voice, clear as crystal.

We returned into the parlour. Games followed the psalms, until, the clock having struck ten, the worthy pastor of the flock made a sign, well understood by all, which stopped all merriment and introduced family-worship. He then opened an enormous folio bible, over which, bending his patriarchal head, he remained a few moments silent, as if to collect his thoughts, and then began to improvise a homily upon the text of the Apocalypse: "These are the two olive-trees, and the two candlesticks, standing before the God of the earth." I thought I understood him to mean that the two candlesticks represented Monsieur and Madame Holdenis ; the little Holdenises were as yet only bits of candles, but with proper efforts were expected to grow into wax-tapers.

As soon as he had closed his big bible, I rose to take my leave. He grasped both my hands, and, looking at me tenderly with tears in his eyes, said : "You see our everyday life. You have found Germany even in this foreign country. I do not wish to hurt your feelings, but Germany is the only place in the world that knows what is meant by real family life, the perfect union of souls, the poetic and ideal sentiment of things. And," added he, with an amiable smile, "I do not think I am mistaken when I say that you seem to me worthy in every way of becoming a German."

I assured him, looking askance at Meta, that he was not mistaken ; that I felt within me something that seemed very much like a touch of divine grace. Half an hour later I repeated the same to Harris, who was waiting for me, furiously impatient, before two bottles of rum and a pack of cards. "Out of what holy-water font do you come?" cried he, when he saw me ; "you smell of virtue half a mile off." And, taking a brush, he dusted me from head to foot. He further

tried to make me promise that I would not return to Florissant ; but in vain. To punish me, he attempted to make me drunk, but no one thinking of Meta could get intoxicated on mere rum.

If "Mon-Nid" proved to my taste, my dear madame, the compliment was reciprocated, for "Mon-Nid" was also well pleased with me ; I felt myself a welcome guest there ; was made a great deal of ; was liked, in short. When I submitted my project to learn German to M. Holdenis, he offered with rare kindness to give me a lesson every day ; and, as on the same occasion I expressed to him a great desire to paint his daughter's portrait, he granted me the request without very much ado. The consequence was, that my uncle Gideon's nephew spent every day several hours in the sanctuary of virtue ; the time given to Ollendorff's grammar, however, was by no means the most agreeable : not that M. Holdenis was a bad teacher, but his disquisitions seemed to me rather long-winded. He repeated too often that the French were a giddy people, that their poets and artists were devoid of ideality, that Corneille and Racine were cold rhetoricians, that La Fontaine was wanting in grace and Molière in mirth. He demonstrated also, at too great a length, that the German was the only language that could express the depths of the soul and the infinitude of sentiment.

On the other hand, I always found Meta's sittings too short. The portrait I had undertaken was to me the most attractive I had ever attempted, but also the most laborious of tasks. I often despaired of any creditable result, so hard was it for me to express what I saw and felt. Is there anything more difficult than to reproduce with the brush the charm that is not beauty ? to fix on the canvas a face without decided lineaments and features, whose whole merit consists in ingenuousness of expression, in blushing candour, in the

caresses of the eye, and the luminous grace of the smile? Nor was that all: there lurked in that angelic face something else, which I strove in vain to render. There are all sorts of angels, you know, madame: those we see in Germany are different from those of other countries; their eyes, which are sometimes turquoise-colour, have the peculiarity of promising, in mystic language, pleasures which turn out to be no pleasures at all, but only troubles and pains. Whoever has travelled in your country will understand what I mean; he must surely have met with women of adorable candour, who breathe the very voluptuousness they seem ignorant of—virginal innocences, capable of converting a libertine to marriage and virtue, because he imagines that he will not lose anything by it; in short, angels sublimely ignorant of all vice, but to whom, again, nothing vicious would be a matter of surprise.

But enough of that; I only wished to explain to you why I despaired of succeeding with Meta's portrait. She seemed always very willing to sit for me, and appeared to like my company. She was, in turns, serious and playful. When serious, she would question me about the Louvre, or the history of painting. When inclined to merriment, she amused herself by talking German to me, and made me repeat the same word ten times after her. I generally answered as well as I could, making use of all I knew; my cock-and-bull stories made her sometimes laugh until the tears came. I gained by it the right of calling her by her pet name "Maüschén," which I managed to introduce into all I had to say; and, as the word was hard to pronounce, it proved the most useful of exercises to me. At the end of every sitting, and to repay me for my trouble, she would recite to me "The King of Thule." She recited with exquisite taste, and whenever she came to the last lines—

"Then downward drooped his eyelids
And never more drank he,"

her eyes filled with tears, and her voice became so faint and trembling that it seemed to die away. She sang that beautiful song so often to me that I soon knew it by heart, and indeed know it yet.

These were our amusements. There was another in which I alone indulged. I often wondered, looking at her, whether I loved that amiable girl as a lover or as an artist. I soon learned, however, what to think about it. She used to fix her hair with a sort of careless grace. One morning, when she had had the unfortunate caprice to smooth it down close to her face, and hide certain wandering curls that played on her forehead, I lectured her on the subject, and told her that a cold correctness was the death of art. Thereupon she began to laugh, sportively untied her abundant hair, which fell like a shower over her face, and, with her elbows on her knees, looked fixedly at me with those azure eyes through the chestnut-waves. I have told you before what may be sometimes read in the eyes of these German angels. I hardly know exactly what hers meant, but I felt plainly that I did not love them for art's sake ; and that same day, coming back to my hotel, I talked so wildly to Harris on the subject that he declared to me in the most contemptuous tones that, in his opinion, I was a lost man ; that I was about to drown myself in a bowl of milk, which, for an artist, is certainly the most despicable of ends.

It is certain that, to my great astonishment, the most domestic ideas began to bud in my romantic brain ; seizing my head with both hands, I would sometimes ask myself if it was still my own. From day to day, from sitting to sitting, I felt the aversion I had conceived for marriage gradually diminish. It seemed to me even that there was some sense in Uncle Gideon's postscript. I persuaded myself that an accomplished housewife was a great resource, and an excellent thing in the life of an artist ; a housewife who

unites with an innocent heart a cultivated mind, a love for the beautiful, and that particular grace of manner that scatters flowers on the paths of life ; a housewife who can weep in reciting "The King of Thule," and who understands how to cover the lower pleasures of this world with rose-leaves culled in heaven. To cap the climax, M. Holdenis praised to me one evening the German custom of long betrothals. "Look," said he, in a lyrical tone—"look now at some young man who is about leaving his home to battle with the world. You will find him walk contemptuously by the noisy pleasures of the capital, and the wild orgies of the children of the world. What is it that guards him against temptations? What talisman, what amulet, protects him against all witchcraft and all stain? Ah ! it is the sweet and chaste image of his fair or dark haired bride which he bears engraved on his heart ! She awaits him ; he has promised to return to her with a pure soul and pure hands. The angel of chaste love watches over him, and keeps the tempter at bay." Shall I confess it—this speech, which might as well as not have been an harangue *ad hominem*, sounded eloquent to my ears ! This shows how far I was gone.

The strongest spur to love is jealousy. Now, for two weeks I had been annoyed by an ominous guest, who came regularly every day to Florissant—a certain Baron Grüneck, whom I heartily wished back in his native Pomerania. He was an old bachelor, bordering on sixty, an odd little man with a cough, much bent, wearing a wig, and with legs so stiff that they seemed to be all in one piece. I think he suffered from a sort of rheumatism in his joints ; perhaps, also, in his younger days, he had swallowed a cavalry-sabre, which he had not yet digested.

What provoked me was, the ado that was made over this clown. A few remarks, moreover, dropped unawares, to-

gether with his officious attentions and fawning assiduities, set me a-thinking. He would always take a seat by Meta, and had a strange way of looking at her—straight into her eyes. He recited madrigals to her, presented her with emblematical bouquets tied with long black-and-white ribbons, whereon were pictured Potsdam and the King of Prussia passing his cavalry in review. During our sittings he would often whisper to her in German, protracted gibberish of which I could not understand a word, and which used to act dreadfully on my nerves. One day, when she was thirsty, he went to get her a glass of water. She drank half; he took the glass from her, and swallowed the rest at one draught, crying, "It is nectar!" I was provoked with Meta for tolerating such familiarities, and particularly for allowing him to play with the ribbons of her belt. To be sure, she exchanged every now and then a smile with me, which was a sufficient satire on the old baron to set my heart at rest. Still, her kindness seemed to me rather excessive.

I thought it prudent not to wait any longer, and to declare my intentions at once. I considered that my first duty was to dispel forthwith, by a frank explanation, the illusions which the excellent M. Holdenis entertained in regard to my fortune and profession; not only had I not contradicted them, but I had also confirmed him in them, by my expensive way of living, and my passion for chestnut horses. It so happened that one morning he came to see me at my hotel. He greeted me with his usual amenity, but I could perceive a cloud on his fine, downcast brow, which reminded me that he had for some time been rather absent and anxious. "He wants to speak to me," I thought, "and is disappointed that I do not encourage his confidence."

However, he spoke at first only about indifferent subjects. I determined to break the ice, and, in a few rapid words, gave him the whole history of my youth—of my artist's dreams

and ambition, of the last conversation with my father, the cooper, and of my uncle Gideon's letter. He was surprised for a moment, and looked like a man just awakening from a dream; but he soon collected himself, questioned me on various points I had touched upon too lightly, and entered into the details of my little affairs with exceeding kindness. He represented to me that the career of an artist was a rather hazardous one; that no doubt I had much talent, of which his daughter's portrait was a proof; but that I should not carelessly reject my uncle Gideon's proposition; that the sentiment of the ideal ennobled all trades, and that the banking business would not prevent me from painting in my leisure hours.

"We will talk this over again, some time or other," he continued; "but allow me now to scold you a little. I hardly dare say it, but it seems to me that you do not look seriously enough upon life, which is so serious a thing; that your expenses must outrun your resources, and that you carry the heedlessness of youth a little too far". . . . Then, after a pause: "You are going to dismiss me now, as a bore and an indiscreet mentor. Come, allow me to put you to the test. Is it not dangerous for a young man of your disposition to carry twelve thousand francs or more about his person, to say nothing of the folly of letting this money lie unproductive? Keep two thousand, and give me the ten other thousand to invest in my business. Thank God! my affairs are in so good a condition that I can give you a large interest; entrust it to me; the dividends included, it will bring you ten per cent., and yield you a safe little income. Is that asking too much of you? Is the effort too great a one? Come, there is a beginning to everything, to fortune as well as to wisdom. You ought to consent to this trial."

While speaking thus, he coaxed me in all sorts of ways—called me his dear child, and the like. It appeared to me

plain and certain that he would not be so much interested in my virtue if he did not see in me the future husband of his daughter. I made a powerful effort, went to my secretary, and took out ten bank-notes of a thousand francs each. I must confess to you, however, that I looked a while at them considerably perplexed; the notes themselves seemed agitated. I handed them to M. Holdenis, who gave me forthwith a receipt for them. Then rising, and fixing upon me a most paternal look, he said: "It is well; I am sure your conscience feels easy now; believe me, this alone is happiness;" and, on taking his leave, he folded me in his arms.

I do not know whether my conscience felt particularly easy; I did not take the trouble to examine it; but, as to myself, I felt quite satisfied with the bargain I had just made. I had exchanged my ten thousand francs for the permission to open my heart to Meta. There remained nothing more to do than to find a suitable opportunity. I lay several days in wait without being able to find one. The insupportable Baron Grüneck would not stir from the place. At last, thanks to his rheumatism, which one day obliged him to keep his room, I obtained the long-wished-for *tête-à-tête*. Meta wore, that evening, a cherry-coloured bow in her hair, and a belt of the same colour; she had on a very pretty white dress, the ample sleeves of which displayed the beauty of her arms. It was one of her serious days: some dream or other was filling her head, and was peeping at intervals through her eyes; but, like the phantom that it was, would as quickly flit away, as if frightened by the light.

After dinner she went alone into the garden. I followed her, and found her seated on a bench, where I took a seat beside her. The night was warm, and the nightingales were singing. The twilight had left on the horizon vague gleams that gradually died away, and the stars began to appear one

after the other. Meta, who knew everything, named them each to me as they appeared. She next began to talk about the other world—about eternity; she told me that, to her, paradise meant a place where the soul drank in God with as little effort as the plants drink in the air here below. After having listened to her awhile, “My paradise,” said I, whispering into her ear, “is this bench here, and these eyes of yours.” So saying, I wound my arm around her waist, and, raising her hand to my lips, printed upon it a long kiss. She disengaged herself slowly, but without anger; and, before withdrawing her hand from mine, she allowed me to press it against my lips; it was burning hot. All at once some one called her; she ran off, and I was obliged to postpone the conclusion of my speech to some better time.

I slept imperially that night; my dreams were delicious, and my awakening still more so. I was not expected at Florissant before the afternoon, but I hastened there early in the morning, so heavily hung upon my lips the word I was prevented from saying—so anxious was I to bind myself by an irrevocable vow! I entered without ringing the bell, and found no one in the parlour. As I was about to withdraw, I spied Meta on the veranda. Her back was toward me. I called her; but a little fountain bubbling near by prevented her hearing me. I advanced on tiptoe. She was sitting at a round table, and, leaning on her elbows before a large sheet of paper, she appeared plunged in a sort of ecstasy. I stretched my neck, and saw that she had drawn in ink a wreath of violets and forget-me-nots, and had traced within, in large capital letters, these four words, “Madame la Baronne Grüneck.” This was what she was contemplating in such beatific meditation.

Did you ever take a Scotch shower-bath, madame? Do you know how the unfortunate bather, who has just been plunged into hot water, feels, as the first ice-cold drops of

the shower-bath above run down his shoulders? It was a surprise of this kind that my amorous delirium underwent at that moment. I slunk away; but, before leaving the parlour, I went to the easel whereon stood the nearly-finished portrait of "Maüschen," and wrote on the frame, "She worshipped the stars and Baron Grüneck," and then made off like a thief.

I was five days without again setting foot in "Mon-Nid." I employed them in making a boat-excursion on the lake with Harris. The day after our return to Geneva, I saw him enter my room like a cannon-ball. "Do you know the news?" cried he to me; "a porter has just been telling it to the door-keeper of the hotel. The house of the virtuous Holdenis has suspended payment; the property is in the hands of his creditors, and proceedings have already commenced against him. The worthy man was in the habit of speculating on the stock-exchange, and was unfortunate. The affair is a very suspicious one. They speak of enormous deficits, and it is said that the creditors will not get ten per cent. of their money back. Fortunately, you are not one of them. Where there is nothing, the devil himself cannot take anything."

At these words I remained petrified—dumb as marble, and surely I must have looked as white, for Harris staggered back. "What, Tony, my son!" cried he, "sweet child of Burgundy, has this unctuous sharper found a secret way to your indigent means?" and, bursting into a roar of laughter and rolling himself on the floor, "Oh, primitive candour!" cried he, "sweet union of souls, poetic sentiment, kingdom of celestial blue, I adore you! Oh, patriarchal virtue! are these the tricks you play?" He would have said more, but I was already down-stairs, running with all my might, with my heart full of rage. I was counting and recounting in my mind, on the way, the delicious pleasures that could be pro-

cured for two thousand crowns, and cast furious looks on all the passers-by.

I reached "Mon-Nid" all out of breath. I bounded into M. Holdenis's study. He was alone; his large folio bible lay open before him. "This," cried he, as he laid his hand on the holy book, "this is the great, the only comforter!"

When Burgundian youths are angry, madame, they are not in the habit of weighing their words. "It is possible," cried I, in a voice breathless but thundering, "that rogues find consolation in the bible; but what, I ask then, is to console their dupes?"

He did not get angry; he contented himself with raising his eyes to heaven, as if to ask pardon for my blasphemous words, which were disrespectful only to his own hypocrisy; then, coming toward me, despite my resistance, he took hold of both my hands. In reply to my reproaches and invectives, he had nothing but windy and moaning and whining explanations to give. He called on the four evangelists to witness that, in borrowing my ten thousand francs, he had only my good at heart, and meant to put my money in safety; he confessed, however, that for the time being he had made use of it to pay a pressing note. He showed himself, meanwhile, thoroughly learned in casuistry, and most expert in the detection of motives. He gave me, next, a most verbose and obscure account of what he called his misfortune: mysterious enemies had plotted his ruin; he had allowed himself to be taken in by an adventurer; and an insolvent creditor had finally given him the death-blow; ending with pitiable exclamations as to what would become now of his excellent wife and his poor children! I heard sobs in the next room. I thought I recognised Meta's voice. Meta, however, was henceforth to me simply the Baroness Grüneck.

I took from my pocket the receipt M. Holdenis had given.

me, and, tearing it into four, threw the pieces on the floor. "I will not add to your troubles," I cried with bitter irony. "Your debt to me is henceforth a debt of honour; or, if you prefer it, you owe me nothing. Your conscience, or the gospel, may decide." With these words I left the sanctuary of virtue, determined never to return to it again. A few hours later I settled my bill at the hotel, and set off for Basle.

As the train moved away, a little man, made all of one piece, appeared on the platform, and despite the objections of the officials around, jumped into the carriage next to mine. There are times when rheumatism has wings. This little man was no other than Baron Grüneck.

II.

You know, madame, by what process fishes are cleansed from the earthy taste they acquire in the river's slime: they are put into fresh water. I had to resort to quite a different treatment. I had conceived such a horror of virtue, that, to cleanse myself of the little I had left, I plunged into the very midst of the mire. I stopped at Baden, which responded to my wishes. I met there women who cared very little about stars, and had never attempted to define paradise. They were kind to me; Fortune was not. I tried in vain to get my two thousand crowns back at the gaming-table; I lost, instead, the last feathers of my already much-plucked wings. More enraged than ever, I set out for Dresden, where I arrived in a state bordering on absolute destitution. I was so poor that I had to part with the few baubles I possessed, and a portion of my clothes. Full of spleen, sick of vice, but still bearing virtue a grudge, I

swore enmity to all blue eyes, all crystal voices and unctuous smiles.

These feelings soon wore off, however. I was not long in finding out that the whole world was *fatto come la nostra famiglia*, and that everywhere the tares grow up with the wheat. I found, by chance, lodgings with the best people in the world, who, it is true, had not much to say about the ideal. I paid them, the first month, a small sum in advance; the second, finding myself short, I confided to them my troubles. They had taken a liking to me, and not only comforted me and put me at my ease, in regard to payments, but even offered to board me, and to advance me money to refurnish my wardrobe; which kindness, however, I declined to accept. For several weeks I dined only about once every three days; the two others I lived on bread and water. This melancholy diet did not in the least affect my health. I was strong and robust, and, with a new confidence in the future, my former cheerfulness returned also. Although hunger kept me sometimes awake all night, I whistled as merrily as a lark. I spent my days at the picture-gallery, where I was copying Rembrandt's portrait, which you have seen, and in which he has painted himself with a glass in his hand and his wife on his knees. I had taken it into my head that, on the day on which my copy was finished, I should find a purchaser for it. Faith removes mountains.

I think now of those weeks of distress, when I became acquainted with hunger—real hunger—as of a happy time that made an era in my life. Misery is a good nurse, whose meagre breasts furnish her sucklings with a wholesome and nourishing milk. I delighted in my work; I had no longer any doubts about my vocation. It seemed to me that I had revealed myself to myself; that I had discovered what my will was, and that that will was worth something. In leaving the gallery, and finding myself again on the pavement of

the street, in the midst of strangers who, no doubt, had breakfasted, and were on their way to their dinner, I persuaded myself that there was nothing more important in the universe than Rembrandt and his chiaroscuro. When my stomach called for food, I declared to it proudly that its cravings, like the dinners of others, were but vain chimeras ; that my uncle Gideon did not exist, though he stupidly pretended he did ; and that, in this world of illusions, the happiest shades are those which are not troubled with digestion.

The duration of my trials did not exceed my strength. One evening, on returning to my kennel, I found on my table two letters and a sealed package. One of these letters was from M. Holdenis. He had obtained my address from Harris, to whom I had written, and told me, in the most solemn style, that, to the eternal confusion of all light-headed youths who do not scruple to brand with their suspicions true honour and piety, his perfect integrity had been universally established. He told me, next, that his creditors had subscribed to an agreement by which they had consented to a present twenty-per-cent. payment, in the confidence that M. Holdenis, with the help of God, would retrieve his fortunes, and that all would be paid back to them, with interest. He added that, not having two thousand francs at his disposal, he had allowed his daughter to sacrifice in my favour a family jewel, which was fully worth that sum, and more, perhaps—so eager was he to prove to me that his former probity had suffered no alteration. This man and his way of understanding the payment of debts of honour appeared to me rather curious. I thought that to pay me thus with his daughter's trinkets showed very little delicacy indeed.

I opened the second letter ; the writing was in a trembling hand, and contained the following communication :

“Sir,—My poor father informs me that he is in your debt.

He assures me that the bracelet, which you will find in the accompanying casket, is worth about the amount he owes you. At all events, I send you, unknown to him, all my jewels, beseeching you to dispose of them as you think proper, and to keep it a secret. I wish you happiness : to us it is for ever lost."

This note, which I thought rather touching, reconciled me somewhat to the recollection of "Maüschen." I immediately carried the trinkets to an honest jeweller, who had already given me a fair price for my own baubles. He assured me that the bracelet was, at most, worth five hundred francs, and he estimated at about double that sum the accompanying necklace, ring and medallion. I sold him the bracelet for the price he offered, and made the rest up into a packet, which I sent back to Meta, with the few words, "Thanks—it was too much." To her hypocrite of a father I wrote the following lines : "Sir,—I have had the trinket you sent me estimated at its full value. You owe me nothing more. My thoughtlessness acquits your probity of the rest of the debt." This done, and after having paid to my kind landlords my arrears of rent, I asked of my philosophy the permission to treat myself for once to a good dinner at the Belvedere ; once does not establish a habit. After leaving the table, I took a long walk on the beautiful Brühl terrace that borders the left shore of the Elbe. I asked myself, while walking, "What is this Meta ?" and I tried to define her character. I thought of her for several hours. The next day I banished all recollection of her from my thoughts ; I was an artist, and a native of Beaune.

My presentiments meanwhile had not deceived me. At the very hour, when, palette in hand, I was giving the finishing touches to my copy, there came into the gallery a

tall gentleman, whose countenance attracted my attention. He bordered on fifty, but his thick black hair, without the least touch of gray, did not betray his age. He had a noble appearance and a commanding aspect—the manners and air of the best society; his eyes were deep and piercing, and his face had a grave and almost severe expression, which, however, was at times suddenly illuminated by the most engaging of smiles.

This scrutiny lasted but a moment. I returned to my picture, compared it with the original, and held secret confabulations with my conscience; we were somewhat uneasy. Suddenly I heard a voice behind me say, "If this copy is for sale, I will buy it." I turned quickly. The words had really been addressed to me, and that unexpected purchaser, whom the providence of beggars was thus sending me, was no other than the stranger with the grave face and charming smile. His name was M. de Mauserre, and he was no less a personage than the French Minister at Dresden. We became so quickly acquainted, that the next day I was invited to dine at his house. A week later, I began his portrait, which I completed in six weeks, and in honour of which he gave a state-dinner to the whole diplomatic corps. How I should have liked to see the good-man cooper of Beaune watch, from his obscure Burgundy home, the fortunes of his hare-brained son!—how courted, caressed and complimented he was on that great day! The following spring I sent this famous portrait to the Paris Exhibition. The public at large did not take much notice of it, but it was commended by artists, who prophesied that I was destined to make my mark. As the intelligent M. Holdenis had said, there is a beginning to everything.

God bless my uncle Gideon! It was through him that I went to Dresden, where I learned German, and met M. de Mauserre. Although this distinguished statesman does not

play the principal part in the story I am relating to you, I must stop a moment to tell you about him, for I feel under the greatest obligations to him. I believe that long and fast friendships arise less from similarity of character and situation in life than from a certain conformity of thought and judgment. You and I, madame, are very good friends, and yet we resemble each other very little. I often ask myself how it was that M. de Mauserre should have taken a liking to, and admitted into his intimacy, so half-polished a fellow as I, so ignorant of everything that is not strictly connected with his profession ; one who lived and thought at hap-hazard, and never reflected seriously upon anything. When I questioned him on the subject, he answered that, apart from my talent for painting, which had at once struck him as auspicious, he had found in me what he called a good mind. He meant by that, I suppose, something of that blunt common-sense which preserves us from foolish contempt and imbecile conceit. He himself possessed a very superior mind ; he had travelled much, observed much, read much, and his experience of life, as well as his reading, had been brought into the service of his keenness of insight and natural good judgment. One felt in him an intelligence that had been well fed, and had digested all.

The superior man is he who, in addition to understanding his own business well, knows something besides. M. de Mauserre was such a one. His profession was to him a matter of choice and worship. He used to say that diplomacy is an art that involves four others : the art of gaining information, which requires eyes and ears ; the art of giving information, the first condition of which is to know how to place oneself in other people's situations ; the art of advising, the most delicate of all ; and, finally, the art of negotiating, where character must come to the assistance of judgment. I think he excelled in all these

four parts. His diplomatic messages stood in high appreciation in the cabinet; he read me some, which, I thought, were masterpieces of style.

Whether from a feeling of timidity, or the desire to be agreeable, many diplomatists tell their government only what will please it; they prefer to deceive rather than to cause displeasure. M. de Mauserre would have considered it dishonourable to dissemble in politics and conceal useful truths merely because they were disagreeable; but he knew how to present them with so much art that he made them acceptable. He carried into his negotiations with foreign ministers the same respect for others which he had for himself; he looked upon humbug as a means that was soon worn out, showed a meagre mind, and killed authority in the end, and that the great secret is to persuade without having resort to falsehood, which, according to him, was a bridge for asses. Nothing contracts the mind more than the fear of being duped, and it is the malady of many politicians who in their excess of caution often miss precious opportunities. M. de Mauserre did not lightly put trust in people, but he was capable of a prompt and generous confidence, of which he told me he had scarcely ever had occasion to repent. This generosity of sentiment was communicated to his way of thinking. He looked on things from a high standpoint; he believed in the power of general ideas. Whilst admitting the fortuitousness of the things of this world, he had sufficient esteem for the human species to believe that small accidents and minor intrigues did not explain all its history; that public opinion was the true sovereign of the world; that all great events are the victory or the defeat of an idea: thus he held in equal contempt all empirics and utopians. He liked to put them on their hobbies while talking to them. It is to these conversations that my mind owes its culture; they enlightened me on

various things, and inspired me with the desire to correct my shameful ignorance, and take to reading.

Our intercourse gradually assumed a more intimate character, and our subjects were no longer confined to politics or painting. M. de Mauserre began telling me of his own affairs. I felt flattered by becoming the confidant of a man whose talents, superiority of mind, fortune, and situation in life paved for him so sure a way to success, and was not a little surprised to find that the shrewdest, the most experienced of men—men who give the best advice in other people's affairs—are often the worst managers of their own.

M. de Mauserre had been a widower for seven or eight years, and began to get tired of single life. The regard and appreciation he was held in by society no longer satisfied him, and he longed for the family circle. He had let slip a number of opportunities, because his heart did not respond to any of them. Happy the ambitious who find in their worldly successes all they crave! Happy, also, the men of pleasure who seek for nothing but amusement! Those who ask in this life for work or diversion only, are sure to find it; but woe to him who owns to a soul! It is the last thing to find employment in this world. M. de Mauserre was neither a man of pleasure nor of mere ambition. He united with a serious mind a warm heart—a circumstance which rather complicates matters. Constant in his attachments, passion with him proved stronger than prudence, and led him to commit so inconsiderate an act as to be thrown out of his career, and become the object of universal blame. So true is it that what is best in us becomes often the source of our greatest troubles.

I had known him about three months, and saw him almost every day, when I thought I perceived some alteration in his mood. In the midst of our conversations he would

often drop into a long silence, from which he could not arouse himself without effort. I at first attributed these preoccupations to some state affairs that were not going according to his wishes, but he soon enlightened me on the subject. He took me, one evening, into his study, and having first carefully and with an air of mystery locked the folding-door, he next proceeded to tell me that, having full confidence in my friendship, and being on the point of coming to a most serious determination, he wished to discuss the question with me.

Then, rising, and walking up and down the room, he confessed to me, with many deep sighs, that he was desperately in love with the best, the most charming of women, who was in the power of a brutal husband, who treated her shamefully. He was sure of being loved in return ; but up to that day he had obtained no favours, because the lady (to quote his own expression) had a soul as straight as an arrow ; that she would never stoop to a falsehood, and, whatever reason of complaint she might have against her tyrant, would never betray or deceive him. He added, that he loved her too passionately himself to consent to share her with a husband ; he meant to have her all his own, and had no alternative left but to run away with her. "Fortunately," continued he, "the man who married her and makes her so miserable comes from a country that sanctions divorces. After the noise this elopement will necessarily make, he will, no doubt, hasten to vindicate his liberty, and she will become my wife."

"M. de Mauserre, individually, will be made a happy man thereby, no doubt," I said ; "but what will become of the French Minister !"

He held down his head awhile, then spoke. "Well, yes —I shall have to renounce a career I love. I shall ask for an indefinite leave of absence ; reasons for it will not be want-

ing. I shall allege the state of my health. The fact is, that I was ill last year, and the physicians told me that the climate of Germany did not agree with me; that if I remained in Dresden I should make myself liable to a relapse. Things cannot always be conciliated; life is so fashioned that we must choose for ourselves. Happiness cannot be given; it has to be bought."

Thereupon he praised to me, in the warmest terms, the beauty, the charms, the various qualities of mind and heart of the idol to whom he was ready to sacrifice both his position and fortune. He did not name her; but, from the portrait he gave of her, I recognised unmistakably a creole of French origin, a Madame de N——, married to a diplomatist, who, *blasé* about her charms, sacrificed her to unworthy creatures with whom he lived publicly. I had met this beautiful victim of conjugal life at the theatre; everybody at Dresden admired and pitied her. M. de Mauserre had introduced me to her. It seemed to me that he had somewhat overrated the qualities of her mind, which was rather mediocre than otherwise. As for her beauty, it could not be surpassed; its brilliancy was truly marvellous, and it was accompanied by such languid, lazy grace, that it is no wonder it bewitched the heart of the plenipotentiary, still young at fifty.

I spoke that evening, madame, like one of the seven sages of Greece. It is so easy to be wise for others! I represented to M. de Mauserre that he was about to commit a great folly; that follies carried with them long regrets and dire repentances; that passion soon wears out, and that, when his should have cooled down, he would wonder that he could have made such sacrifices for it; that, to a man of his temperament, a useless, aimless life would in the end become intolerable; that his unoccupied faculties would torture him; that only wilful recluses, dreamers, and poets, could find their happiness in irregular conditions of life; but that men born for

action and government had to submit to the rules of society, just as a whist-player is bound to respect the rules of the game if he would not be excluded from the set.

"You may be happy one year—perhaps two, at most," I said to him; "the third you will discover that your happiness is that of the galley-slave; that you have a cannon-ball fastened to your foot, and that, while cursing it, your loyalty obliges you to drag it along with you to the end."

He interrupted me to explain that he did not mean to bid an everlasting farewell to affairs; that I talked as if he were going to settle down for ever to an irregular course of life; that, on the contrary, he meant to legalise the situation as soon as possible; that, if he were once married, his unapproved mode of procedure would soon be forgotten, and the services he had rendered, and could still render, would alone be remembered.

"But what assurance have you, sir," I replied, "that everything will happen according to your fancy, and that circumstances and men will prove as obliging as you suppose? Husbands are terrible men! Are you quite sure that this one will oblige you by claiming a divorce? Who knows but that he may prove of a thwarting disposition, and will prefer to his liberty the sweets of a long vengeance?"

He fought my objections down inch by inch, yet not without repeated sighs, and, as I insisted, he put an end to my remonstrances by saying that the passions of advanced life were the most violent of all; that he had not the strength to resist his, and that he had that very morning written to the minister to request him to appoint a successor to his place. It is thus with all people who ask for advice. They know perfectly well beforehand what they intend to do, and stick to their purpose, despite all opinions to the contrary. You have but to approve of their course.

M. de Mauserre was so determined in his resolution, that

all efforts on my side to dissuade him from it were wrecked against his will—a will led all astray, delighting in its error and persisting in its chimera. The minister fought strongly against a decision the motives of which he was far from guessing, for he believed in the health-reasons which M. de Mauserre had alleged. He begged him to have but a little patience, assuring him that, if the climate of Dresden did not agree with his health, he would soon be called to fill an important post in some of the Southern capitals. I, on my side, renewed the assault, but was repulsed with loss.

In the meantime his plans wellnigh failed through Madame de N——'s own objections, who felt herself tied by her duty and tormented by her own scruples. She considered herself unworthy—the modest, delicate soul—of the sacrifice he was about to make. But she was at last induced to yield to his desperate supplications, which refused to listen to reason.

How can a woman long resist a man whom she loves, when he declares that he will blow out his brains, and she knows that he will keep his word? M. de Mauserre announced to me one day, with a triumphant air, that his resignation was accepted, and that all was in readiness for the carrying out of his plans. A week later he set out for the Springs of Gastein, where Madame de N—— soon joined him; and, two months after, a letter dated from Sorrento informed me that there was one more happy couple under the sky of Naples. The same letter invited me to come shortly to Florence, to paint the portrait of the most adorable and most adored of women. You may imagine what excitement this adventure created in Dresden: it was pitilessly condemned by the good sense of some and the jealousy of others.

The follies of the wise are the best lessons for fools. If the conversation of M. de Mauserre had enlightened my mind on many questions, his last reckless step caused me to make the most salutary reflections. I determined to prove to the

world that on certain occasions an artist could manage his boat better, perhaps, than a diplomatist. Up to that time I had been pretty much subject to my caprices; my will suddenly showed them a royal countenance, and talked to them as a sovereign—like Louis XIV., with spurs on his heels and whip in hand, reducing his parliament to reason. I left Dresden towards the end of the winter, intending to return. I like the city, and have left a few good friends there. Immediately after my return to Paris I wrote to my uncle Gideon to find another son and successor for himself; then I started for Italy, stopping on the way at Beaune, where I spent two days with my father. He called me a fool, but my well-filled purse made him open his eyes. Yet, to satisfy his conscience, he would snub me, nevertheless. These scolding fathers are a wise institution. The man who has never eaten anything but white bread at home will always find the stranger's bread bitter.

M. de Mauserre was right in settling down in Florence. It is the most tolerant city in the world toward adventurers, the most hospitable toward illegal situations; the spirit of the Decameron still dwells there. I found my travelling pigeons in the full enjoyment of their honeymoon. I had proved, however, a better prophet than I could have wished. The husband had turned a deaf ear to all the propositions they had plied him with: insinuations, threats, promises, all the springs which had been brought to bear on him, proved useless. This stubborn Menelaus was fully resolved not to ask for a divorce: he did not in fact, like the other, think of recapturing his wife; all he wanted was to prevent her from marrying Paris.

“Much good may it do him!” said M. de Mauserre to me; “he cannot prevent us from being happy together.”

The portrait of Madame de N——, whom, with your permission, I shall henceforth call Madame de Mauserre, was

soon in a fair way. Excuse my boasting of it; it made my fortune. Its success at the Exhibition was a perfect infatuation: orders, fortune, reputation—I owe everything to it; but I confess that the miraculous beauty of the model had still more share in this triumphant success than the talent of the painter.

It was while studying the beauty of the model, in order to do it full justice, that we became friends. I have told you that Madame de Mauserre had a very ordinary mind—poor land, which, even if cultivated, would scarcely, I think, have proved very productive. Her spelling was peculiar, and she had read hardly anything but the volumes of the Blue Library and the “Imitation of Christ”—works which were ever new to her; she could read them for the hundredth time, and still fancy it the first. This too candid statement may injure her in your esteem, madame—you who have so many acquirements, and have read so much. You do not like women that do not read. I assure you, however, that if she failed to be intelligent, a closer acquaintance with her made up for that deficiency. She had an inventive heart. The delicacy and vivacity of her sympathies made her ingenious in discovering the secret desires of those around her. This kind of intelligence is, it seems to me, sufficient for a woman, when she is as beautiful as sunlight into the bargain. Her sincerity was admirable; her soul, frank as a willow wand, was incapable of dissembling or disguising anything. She gave herself out candidly for what she was, and did not think of it as of a virtue, because she fancied that everybody was like her. Thus she was often the dupe of others. But I have since had occasion to think still less of women who are never taken in.

Her only fault was a creole laziness, which she carried to an incredible degree. I shall make you shudder when I tell you that it cost her an effort to get up before noon, and that,

with the exception of a little tapestry, all finger or head work frightened her. The least walk was a terrible undertaking for her. But it is only the lazy people who complain of weariness that are blameworthy. Madame de Mauserre never complained of weariness: she could sit for whole hours coiled up in a corner of her sofa, fan in hand, speaking or not speaking (it was all the same to her), in love with her idleness, which allowed her to busy herself with her thoughts. To exist, was enough for her; she was happy in feeling herself alive and beloved. Some fairy, no doubt, catching one day a feather that had fallen from the wing of a turtle-dove and was floating in the air, rocked by the breezes of the spring, converted that feather into a woman; this woman was Madame de Mauserre. She had preserved all the softness and airiness of that feather; and, as she had formerly been rocked by the wind, she now allowed herself to be rocked by life.

I must add, however, that on certain occasions her exquisite kindness triumphed over her laziness. When the question was, to be agreeable or to oblige a friend, she spared neither words nor steps. She could also move about and exert herself to serve the poor. I have seen her, in Florence, climb twice a day to the garret of a pretended blind man, who had imposed on her kindness with his effrontery, and I could never persuade her that the scamp could see as well as herself. There was in her intermittent spells of feverish charity something like a desire of expiation: she seemed to say to the people she assisted, "You owe me no gratitude, for I have so much to be forgiven." I succeeded, I think, in expressing something of this in her portrait.

M. and Madame de Mauserre would have wished to keep me near them; but that was out of the question. I promised, in leaving them, to pay them a visit every year, and I kept my word. I found them, the following spring, proud

and delighted over the birth of a little girl, who promised to be as beautiful as her mother. M. de Mauserre's joy was nevertheless mixed with sadness. The thought that the law forbade him to recognise the child as his own was truly painful to him. At the end of the same year Madame de Mauserre was attacked by the smallpox, which nearly carried her off. Her husband spent many weary days in mortal anxiety. I saw her during her convalescence. The malady had proved indulgent toward her ; it left her still one of the handsomest women in Europe, although her rose-and-lily complexion—that rare flower of beauty which has dazzled the world and justified all the follies that have been committed for its sake—had lost its incomparable brilliancy. I do not know what M. de Mauserre's feelings were on the subject. He tried to read mine in my eyes, but these were discreet.

The year following I left Florence less satisfied. I apprehended that M. de Mauserre, whose mind had taken a sober turn, was beginning to regret the bargain he had made with destiny. Great events were brewing in Europe ; they interested him much, and his foresight could predict their consequences. He blamed the policy of the French Government, whose agents, he thought, gave it wrong information and still worse advice. It was the continuous theme of all his conversations. He would get excited over it, and suddenly cry out, in a bitter tone : “ But I forget that I have no longer a voice in affairs ; I forget that I have ceased to be anything.” I compared him to a brave war-horse, who has been put on the retired list before the time, and who hears the roaring of the cannon ; he kicks against the thill that holds him back. Madame de Mauserre had no idea of what was going on within him, for in her presence he affected a cheerfulness that deceived her.

The next summer he appeared to me reconciled with his

fate. To give a diversion to his regrets, he had undertaken to write the political history of Florence, and he employed his time in making researches in the archives. This work restored his serenity. I dare not affirm that he was still in love with his wife; but he felt himself united by an indissoluble tie to the mother of his child. She, on her side, had vowed to him a profound attachment—an attachment mixed with admiration and absolute trust—which was only to die with her.

A few months later we agreed to meet in Spain, where I intended to study the god of painting, Velasquez, the most complete painter that ever existed. I sketched, at Madrid, a picture which has created some sensation, and which represents the last Moorish king, Boabdil, bidding farewell to Granada. At the moment of parting, M. de Mauserre expressed to me his desire to see France again, and establish himself in the country-seat he possessed near Cremieux, a beautiful domain called Les Charmilles. There was, however, one obstacle in the way: he had by his first marriage an only daughter, who had married, seven years before, the Count d'Arcei, whose château was situated about three miles from Les Charmilles.

"My son-in-law is a very estimable man," said he to me, "but a little stiff in his principles. He has never forgiven me what he still calls my last youthful prank, and has forbidden my daughter any further intercourse with me. He has since allowed her to write to me, but on condition that she should never name Madame de Mauserre in her letters, and that she should entirely ignore her existence. It would be hard for me to live in their neighbourhood without seeing them, and it would be still harder for my wife. One can make up one's mind to solitude, but not to isolation. If you could succeed in humanising a little the severe virtue of my son-in-law, and bringing about friendly relations

between us, you would fulfil Madame de Mauserre's dearest wish and I should be under the greatest obligations to you."

I left, entrusted with this delicate commission. I found in Madame d'Arci a worthy lady, who favoured my suit from the first. She resembled her father, but her father in repose. M. de Mauserre was a sage, with a romantic imagination. He had bestowed upon his daughter his wisdom only, and kept his romance and flightiness for himself; that is to say, she possessed neither the brilliant nor the dangerous sides of his mind. She had a most equable temper, a most uniform reason, an excellent heart, and a cold imagination. Although she had a quick intelligence, she was given to perpetual astonishments—probably because there are so many things in human life that escape reason. Adventures were incomprehensible to her—perfect Chinese riddles. She would say: "Is it possible! How could they do it! What were they about! Had they lost their senses?"—she knew these could not be exactly lost, but she had such a kind heart that she was willing to forgive without understanding. Her father's conduct was to her an unfathomable abyss. Still, she could not help loving this prodigal father, and would have willingly exclaimed in the words of the gospel, "Bring forth the best robe and put it on him!" However, in marrying M. d'Arci she had made over to him her will, and was wholly governed by his advice, which she respected like a command. It was to him she sent me.

He did not receive me very well at first. He had a fine mind, with a somewhat unintelligent look, a brusque manner of speaking, a scolding temper, a caustic good sense which spared nothing and no one, and he was in the habit of calling things by their right name: on the whole, the best fellow in the world, who spent his life in doing good while grumbling. He began by declaring to me that his father-in-law was the most absurd man in the universe, and that he would not

allow his wife again to see so foolish a father—who would probably give her as good advice as he had given himself. I answered him that he did not know M. de Mauserre; that a man was not a fool for having committed one folly; that wisdom consisted in committing but one. I represented to him that when, through running off the rails on some railroad-line, a big accident occurs, you may be pretty sure of travelling safely on it for a long time afterwards. In short, I managed him so well, and pleaded so warmly Madame de Mauserre's cause, that he grew tame. He promised me that as soon as M. de Mauserre was at Les Charmilles, he would go to see him, and matters might afterward take their own course. I did not ask for more, for I was quite sure that at their first interview Madame de Mauserre and Madame d'Arci would be friends; that these two straightforward souls would soon recognise and esteem each other. I hastened to announce the result of my commission to M. de Mauserre, and his wife responded in the most grateful and warmest terms.

From Arci I hastened to Beaune, where I had been summoned by my father, who was in a dying condition. He had been suffering for some time from a disease of the heart, which all at once had made alarming progress. He treated me no longer as a fool. "Tony," said he, embracing me, "I do not ask you if you have any talent; I don't understand anything about it; but I should like to know the state of your affairs."

The rather brilliant statement I was able to make satisfied him completely, and he confessed that for once in my life I happened to be in the right against him. But if he was satisfied with me, I was far from being so with his condition, for his strength was visibly on the decline. He was soon no longer able to leave his bed, where his rest was troubled by insupportable suffering. For two whole weeks I did not leave his bedside. He scolded me no longer, and had almost

become tender; and as he was in possession of all his faculties, he would give me, keeping my hands in his, the most pressing advice, the wisdom of which was quite superior to his humble fortunes. He was fond of repeating to me that our passions were our greatest enemies; that the most essential thing was to be able to command them; that it was easy to acquire property, but hard to keep it; and that the discipline of the human will was the secret of durable conquests and long happiness.

One night, as he was again upon this theme, a neighbouring cock began to crow. "Tony," said my father, "I have always loved the crowing of the cock. It announces the day, and chases away the phantoms of the night. This sound resembles a war-cry; it admonishes us to spend our lives in fighting against ourselves. Tony, every time that you hear the cock crow, remember that it is the only music that your father ever liked." On the following night, at the same hour, the same cock uttered a sonorous cry. My poor father tried to raise his head, made me a sign with his finger, and, with an effort to smile, he died. Madame, since that, I have never heard the cock crow without remembering my dying father and his last injunctions. You will see, by-and-by, how needful they were, and how fortunate it was for me to have remembered them. We do not know the value of what we possess till we have lost it. I devoted a few days to my affliction, which was profound, and to the care of my affairs, which task had never been more distasteful to me, and returned to Paris, where a number of unfinished pictures awaited me. I was possessed either by the devil or by Velasquez, and had my gloom to conquer. I worked the whole winter through with such perseverance, that in the spring I was completely spent. Early in April I received a letter from M. de Mauserre, who wrote to me that he had seen his son-in-law and his daughter. The reconciliation

had been so complete, that M. d'Arci, who intended making great repairs at his château, had allowed himself to be persuaded to give it up to the masons and to come and spend the summer with his wife at Les Charmilles. "You alone are wanting to complete the happy circle," added he. "Come quickly ; you can work at your Boabdil here, and begin the portrait of Madame d'Arci."

I accepted the invitation, and, for a little change, I took the route by Cologne, the Rhine, and Switzerland, which was, to be sure, the truant's road. It proved a happy idea, however, since I had the honour of being introduced to you at Bonn, and spending a day with you on that charming terrace where you will probably read this. It is one of the red letter days of my life.

I found, at Mayence, a letter from M. de Mauserre, which said that, since I had taken the longest road, he would punish me for it by giving me an errand in Geneva. His dear little girl Lulu (she was called Lucy, like her mother), who was in her fifth year, was becoming more self-willed every day, and was much in need of a governess. This governess was to be very honest, very learned, very sensible, gentle and firm at the same time—in short, nothing less than perfection. He thought that such a wonder could be more easily found in Protestant countries, and he had written to that effect to a Genevese clergyman whose acquaintance he had made in Rome. He wondered why he had not received a reply, and wished me to inquire into the cause of his silence.

My heart did not beat a whit faster as I walked through the streets of Geneva. I scarcely remembered Meta's existence. Six years make some changes in a man. As a punishment for my forgetfulness, I chanced to meet M. Holdenis at the station. His faded hat and threadbare clothes were a sad comment upon the state of his affairs.

He had the cowering look of a ruined gambler. I bowed to him, but he did not seem to recognise me. I forthwith sought the clergyman M. de Mauserre had directed me to, and acquitted myself of my errand. This clergyman, who had been written to twice and had given no answer, explained to me, in a hesitating tone, that with all his desire to oblige amiable people whom he esteemed much and would like to serve, and notwithstanding the liberal salary that was offered, he had not yet been able to find any one to send to M. de Mauserre; probably," he added, looking at me askance, "you can guess the reason why."

"You are acquainted with M. and Madame de Mauserre," I replied. "Did you ever meet, in your pastoral career, many households more honourable and more united?"

"That is exactly the difficulty," said he, half in earnest, half smiling. "I feel some scruple in sending an honest young girl to people who love each other more faithfully than if they were married. These are virtues the example of which is very dangerous for the young."

He assured me, however, that, if some good opportunity offered, he would not allow it to escape; but I saw very well that he would not seek any. I took my leave thereupon, and whom should I meet in coming from the house? Why, the most splenetic of Harrises! who, having not yet succeeded in discovering the place where amusement could be found, had put off his departure from Geneva all these years, from one day to another, and had not budged from the Hôtel des Bergues. He embraced me yawning, and yawned while congratulating me on what he called my stunning *débuts*. He declared that his incurable *ennui* meant to empty forthwith two bottles of champagne in honour of my young glory. We entered a café. While responding to his toasts, I related to him where I came from, where I was going to, and that I was in search of a governess.

"What salary?" asked he.

"Four thousand francs, payable quarterly, with expectation of increase. Have you a mind to present yourself?"

"No," replied he, laconically; "but I may have some good subject to recommend."

I answered that I considered him competent in all matters, and especially in the choice of a governess, and we spoke of something else. As I was taking leave of him: "You did not inquire about the little mouse?" said he; "and you were right. The poor thing succumbed to the grief of having been treacherously abandoned by you. But perhaps she died only from an indigestion of poetry—or from having recited too often 'The King of Thule'—or from a fish-bone, perhaps. Who knows, indeed, what women die of?"

"Are you only half or altogether in jest?" asked I, not without some emotion, however.

"I am the last man to jest," he replied. "As for the old fox, he wears greasy clothes, to work upon the feelings of his creditors. It is said that for some time he has been hiding money in woollen stockings." With these words he yawned again, and turned upon his heel.

Two days after I was at Les Charmiiles, where I found happy people and cheerful faces. M. d'Arce had even stopped grumbling; he was completely under the charm of the fine manners and cultivated mind of his father-in-law, whom up to that time he had scarcely known, and of whom he had formed an erroneous idea.

"You are the king of friends," said Madame de Mauserre to me, as soon as we were alone. "I could not forgive myself for setting my husband at variance with his children. You have put my conscience at rest." To express her gratitude to me, she had given me the finest apartment of her very beautiful château; my windows commanded a magnificent view. M. de Mauserre had put in repair an old, half-

ruined tower, which stood at the extremity of the garden, and had converted the first story into a charming studio, ornamented with panoplies, fine hangings, and antique chests. I found myself up to my ears in clover.

There was, however, one mar-joy in the house. Notwithstanding her superb, jet-black eyes, Mademoiselle Lulu was at certain times a wild thing—a perfect little demon. When the fit was on her, she would become imperious, passionate, and so violent in her anger as to throw anything that came to hand at anybody's head. They spoiled her fearfully. Madame de Mauserre preached a good deal, threatening sometimes, but without ever carrying any menace into effect. She would say to her, "Lulu, if you break another pane of glass in the conservatory you shall be put to bed." Lulu broke three more panes, and was not put to bed. If they tried to punish her by depriving her of some of her playthings, she would fall into such a terrible fury, followed by spasms, that her mother was frightened, and let her be. Madame d'Arci had too much sense to approve of so much indulgence, but this same discreet good sense forbade her interfering in the matter. If I ever have any children, madame, I shall not often promise them a whipping; but when they shall have deserved one, God help me, but they shall get it! Promise and hold back won't do!

M. de Mauserre, who felt that Lulu's education needed looking after, was very much mortified at the news brought from Geneva. He was on the point of going himself to Paris in search of a governess, when I received from Harris the following note:

"My dear Great Man,—I was much flattered by the confidence you put in me. Wishing to make it good, I set about in quest of the person in demand, and I think I have found the very thing. She is a charming and very capable person,

whom you can recommend in all security of conscience. As you gave me free leave, I arranged matters in the name of M. de Mauserre, and the bargain is concluded. My *protégée* will set out to-morrow by the afternoon train; let your friends send a carriage to meet her at Ambérieux, where she will arrive at six in the evening. You need not thank me; you know I am quite at your service.

“YOUR OLD HARRIS.”

This most unexpected letter put me in a strange embarrassment. An American who does not know what to do with himself is capable of anything. I was afraid that this pretended instructress of Harris's might be some wench he wanted to get rid of, or that it was himself, perhaps; for he was just the fellow to sacrifice his moustache for the pleasure of mystifying a friend. I regretted that I did not acquaint him with the real situation of the parties, and trembled lest his joke might turn out an insult. Unfortunately, his letter reaching me at noon, and the stranger it announced setting out on her way one or two hours later at most, made it impossible for me to parry the blow. I determined to tell all to M. de Mauserre. He took the matter very cheerfully. “Let your friend amuse himself, if he likes, at our expense,” said he; “if he sends us an adventuress, we shall soon know how to receive her.”

“But if she is an honest person,” hastened to put in Madame de Mauserre, “let us try to find it out soon, and take care not to hurt her feelings by improper questions and impertinent looks.”

“Oh, you, my dear, have never yet hurt any one's feelings!” he replied. “You would find some good even in Satan himself, were he to present himself before you with sleeves out at elbows. I predict one thing, and that is, that this person, whether an adventuress or not, will be kissed by

you before you even ask her name. I believe in the instinct of children. It is Mademoiselle Lulu who will tell us with whom we have to do. I mean to regulate my opinion by hers."

We ended by jesting on the subject of the mysterious unknown ; and M. d'Arcei, who had a ready hand at sketching, made a caricature that represented her entrance at Les Charmilles : a columbine, with rather free movements, darting into the drawing-room and pirouetting away with Lulu in her arms ; and from the mouth of Madame de Mauserre the words, "There must be some good in her !"

The carriage left at three o'clock for Ambérieux, and in the evening we were all gathered in the drawing-room awaiting its return. It was very windy ; a storm was coming on, and we heard at the same time the distant rolling of thunder and the pawing of the horses' feet in the court-yard. The door opened. The unknown made her appearance, wrapped in a large brown cloak that fell down to her heels, and the hood of which almost entirely concealed her face. She advanced with rather uncertain steps, and threw back the hood. To my great surprise, I saw emerge from it a face that I knew—a pair of eyes that had cost me two thousand crowns or more.

If men were honest, they would confess that in all such encounters their first impulse is to consult their self-love. I questioned mine, and it answered that my youth had no need of blushing for having been in love at the age of chimeras with the person before me. She had changed somewhat ; she was no longer a young girl, but a woman. Her cheeks were less full, and I thought it rather an improvement. Her look came, as it were, from a greater distance, and seemed impregnated with a gentle melancholy. She had seen many sad things during those six years, and had preserved them in the depth of her eyes.

She did not recognise me. I was seated in the shadow, concealed by a large portfolio in which I was drawing something or other. She was very much confused: either the storm or this meeting with strangers frightened her, for she trembled like a leaf. I was about to rise to come to her assistance, when Madame de Mauserre, whose heart was always quick in such matters, anticipated me, and, to justify the prophecy of her husband, met her kindly, and in her indolent voice said, "You are welcome among us, mademoiselle; try to feel at home." Then putting her arm around her, she was going to lead her to the dining-room; but Meta assured her that she was not hungry.

"Well, then, sit down until you feel some appetite," said Madame de Mauserre; and calling Lulu, she added, "We have a little girl here who will need all your indulgence."

Lulu was at that moment in a detestable humour. She had persisted in staying awake to see her governess, and had been fighting hard against sleep for more than an hour. You know how amiable sleepy children are when they will not go to sleep. When the stranger came in, she stepped back to the farthest end of the room and leaned against the wall, with her hands behind her back, and with a look that said, "This is the enemy!" Her mother called her in vain; she would not budge.

Mademoiselle Holdenis, bending toward her, held out her arms: "Are you afraid of me? Do I look so terrible?" But Lulu turned her back on her and faced the wall. Meta took off her cloak and gloves, and played the first bars of a sonata of Mozart's. I have never known but two women who understood Mozart, and she was one of the two. I recommend her to you, madame, as a very accomplished musician. Lulu felt the charm. She crept slowly toward the piano, and when her governess stopped playing: "Play on," said she, in a tone of reproach.

"No, I am tired."

"Will you play to-morrow?"

"Perhaps—if Lulu is a good girl," replied Meta.

With these words she sat down in an arm-chair without appearing to care any further for the child's approbation. Lulu, piqued at this indifference, said: "You are my governess; do you think I shall mind you?"

"Perhaps."

"Do you fancy I shall kiss you?"

"More wonderful things than that have happened."

More and more puzzled, Lulu came up to her and pulled her dress. Meta turned round, opened her arms, and the next moment, as if overcome by a sweet magnetism, the child was nestled in her lap, and looking into her face, said, "What have you got there, on the left cheek?"

"It is called a beauty-spot."

"And yet you are not pretty, like mamma!" replied Lulu.

"You are good, though."

In less than three minutes she was fast asleep, and her governess looked at her smiling. They formed a pretty group. I kept a sketch of it. Meta rose to carry the child to her bed. Madame de Mauserre wanted to prevent her, and told her that it was the nurse's business. "Pray, let me, madame," replied she, in her sweet voice; "they will wake her in undressing her. I had better do it myself."

She went out with her burden, followed by Madame de Mauserre, who said to me, in passing: "She is charming! Write at once to your friend, and thank him for the treasure he has sent us."

A quarter of an hour later she returned with a letter Mademoiselle Holdenis had brought, and which ran as follows:

"Most honoured sir,—Reverses of fortune, and the diffi-

culty of providing for my numerous family, oblige me to part with the dearest treasure in the world. God is imposing on me a very cruel trial. I never thought that my poor Meta would one day be obliged to earn her living; I had hoped for a happier future for her. Permit a father to recommend his poor dear child warmly to your kindness, and to that of your worthy wife. You will appreciate, I am sure, the nobleness of her character and the elevation of her sentiments. She will teach your dear little girl German; she will also teach her to cast her eyes upward, and to prefer to all worldly goods that supreme ideal which is the nourishment of the heart and the bread of the soul. Pray accept, honoured sir, the respects of your most humble and obedient servant,

BENEDICT HOLDENIS."

On giving me the letter to read, M. de Mauserre underscored with his finger the three words, "*Your worthy wife*," and whispered to me, "We shall have disagreeable explanations to make. Your friend ought to have spared us this trouble by making them himself."

"How could he explain," I said, "what he did not know?"

I handed the letter to M. d'Arci, who made a face, and said: "She is a German, she is called Meta, and she worships the ideal. *Sauve qui peut!*" Then turning to Madame de Mauserre: "You have hurt her feelings, madame, by offering her any supper. Can you imagine that she eats and drinks? That belongs to savages like ourselves!"

"I tell you she is charming!" replied Madame de Mauserre; "I love her already with all my heart!"

"What I like in her," said Madame d'Arci, "is that she is not vain. Otherwise she would have wished to leave her waterproof at the door."

"If you ask me my opinion," said M. de Mauserre, "I

must say that I regret columbine and her pirouettes. The charming Meta makes me think of that woman of whom it was said that her fine eyes and beautiful complexion served only to show off her ugliness."

"Are you quite sure that she is ugly?" interrupted I. "Beware of the first glance! I have known people who, on arriving at Rome, thought the city frightful; eight months later they were still there, and could not get away from it."

"Certainly," said M. d'Arci, in his bantering way, "we have as yet only seen the suburbs. Have you been admitted into the Coliseum?"

"Stop this!" replied Madame de Mauserre, giving him a tap on the mouth with her fan, "otherwise we shall ask Mademoiselle Holdenis to give you a few lessons in ideality."

"My son-in-law is right," said M. de Mauserre. "I believe, as he does, that Tony has special reasons for defending the charms of Lulu's governess.—Tony, will you please inform us in what your friend Harris's joke consists?"

"In this," I replied, "that, unknown to me, he undertook to make me do a good deed of which I ought to have thought myself. M. Holdenis, in a moment of embarrassment, borrowed some money from me, and his daughter sold a bracelet to pay me back. Such a fine trait surely deserved a reward."

"And, since you have become rich, you have no doubt returned her ten bracelets for the one?"

"No, indeed! There is no necessity for teaching girls to pay their fathers' debts."

"Oh, that settles the question!" said he, laughing. "This is no lover's speech."

"Poor thing!" continued Madame de Mauserre, whom this story had much moved. "Poor thing! What candour there is in her eye! How her beautiful soul shines through

her face ! Just now, as I left her a moment to call the nurse, I found her, as I came back, kneeling on the floor by Lulu's bed. She was praying very fervently ! Indeed, it was touching. When she saw me, she blushed to the very roots of her hair, as if I had surprised her in mortal sin.— But, now I think of it, she is a Protestant ; what catechism will she teach Lulu ? ”

“ Mohammedan or Buddhist, I care not ! ” replied M. de Mauserre. “ If her catechism teaches that it is wrong to break the glass in my conservatory and to throw plates at people's heads, her religion is mine, and long live Buddha ! ”

Thereupon every one went to bed. In order to reach my room, I had to go the whole length of the hall where the nursery was. The door was ajar. I could not help pushing it open a little, and I perceived Meta busy emptying her trunks and arranging her clothes in her closets. I had been looking at her for some minutes, when she turned her head and saw me. “ Well,” said I, in German, “ do you know me this time ? ”

She stepped back, and cried out, in French, “ What ! you here ? ”

“ Were you not told that I belonged to the family ? ”

“ If M. Harris had told me, it is very probable that I should not have come,” she added. “ It would make me very unhappy to feel that I have an enemy in a family where I have been so well received.”

“ An enemy ! ” I said, “ and why ? I shall be all you please. Dispose of me. Do you wish me to remember all, or to forget all ? ”

“ I have no more wishes, no more desires,” she replied, with profound sadness. “ Fortunately, I have found here a work to do, and I pray God to help me to accomplish it ; ” and she pointed to Lulu, asleep in the bed. Then, with a half-smile : “ But what have we to do with your memory or

your oblivion in this room?" And gently, with her eyes fixed on mine, she shut the door on me.

That same night I wrote to Harris: "My dear friend, you have wished to prove to me that, sooner or later, the mountains meet. Rest easy, they shall not fight."

That same night the watch-dogs of the château kept up a fearful noise till morning. The next day, at breakfast, Madame de Mauserre, who had been wakened by them, asked us what could have made them bark so. A servant answered that a band of gipsies had encamped in the neighbourhood. She requested Meta to watch Lulu carefully for some days, and not venture with her into the park.—Life would be much easier, madame, if we had only to defend our property against brown faces and highway stragglers.

III.

IF you ever pass through Cremieux, I advise you to stop there. Imagine a little old town, leaning on one side against a natural terrace with a perpendicular wall and the remains of an old fortified convent, and on the other against a rock covered with creeping vines, and crowned by the ruins of an old castle all covered with ivy. This little town, the hotels of which may be recommended, occupies the centre of an amphitheatre of mountains, which opens on the west upon the great undulating valley where the Rhône flows toward Lyons. Cremieux is a charming place for everybody, but especially for artists. They might believe themselves in Italy, so classic a majesty do the lines of the landscape assume, so warm in tone is its soil, so blond and golden its rocks, which seem to exclaim, with the Shulamite, "See how the sun hath looked upon me!"

There the most diverse objects may be found : within a narrow compass, both short and vast horizons, the mountains and the plain , above, oak-groves traversed by paths among boxwood and briers ; below, the freshness of the walnut-trees, the merry grape-vines, the main roads with their long rows of poplar-trees—now and then a deep gorge where a clear brook murmurs along ; or, under a vast sky, marshes planted with alders bathing in black and sluggish waters. If you like a rich, smiling country, clover and corn fields traversed by arcades of grape-vines ; or if you prefer barren, exhausted moors, protected by some old rock on whose nudity a young vegetation has taken pity and covered it up—all that, and more, is to be found at Cremieux. I spent most of my time in my tower, which stood out from the main building ; one of my windows looked upon the wild vale, at the entrance of which the château is seated, and the other upon the plain, which unfolded before my eyes the learned combination of its harmonious lines and successive undulations, and where I could see, moreover, the Rhône sparkling in the distance. I had but to cross my room to go from Poussin to Salvator, to change the style at will.

While I was all admiration, and wandering through the fields, Meta Holdenis was quietly making the conquest of every inhabitant of Les Charmilles. A few days sufficed her to subdue the ungovernable Lulu. She had requested that nobody should come between her and the child ; that no one should interfere with the rules she had laid down or the punishments she might judge proper to inflict. It was a hard point to gain with Madame de Mauserre ; she yielded, however, to the representations of her husband. At the first great misdemeanour of which Lulu became guilty, her governess shut herself up with her in a large room where there was nothing to break ; then taking a seat with her work by the window, she began to sew, letting Lulu storm

as much as she pleased. Lulu did her best ; she stamped with her feet, threw the chairs about, howled. For three consecutive hours there was such a noise that thunder would scarcely have been heard. Her governess kept on sewing, without appearing to be either moved or irritated by this fearful hubbub, until, completely exhausted in strength and lungs, Lulu fell asleep on the floor.

After two or three experiences of this kind, she discovered that she had found a master ; and as, after all, this master seemed to love her, and asked of her nothing but what was reasonable, she concluded that it was best to submit.

Children are so constituted that they esteem what resists them ; and a calm reason, that acts instead of reasoning, works upon them like a charm. Lulu, who, despite her passionate nature, was a good child, became gradually attached to her governess to such a degree that she would not leave her, and often preferred her lessons to playing. This clever instructress understood how to awaken her curiosity, to keep her mind interested, always seasoning her instruction with good-humour and playfulness. In short, so rapid a transformation was brought about in the movements of the little miss, that everybody was astonished. When her fits came on her, it needed sometimes only a look from Meta to subdue her. It was a miracle. A gentle firmness, equability of temper, composure, untiring patience, will always work miracles ; but you must confess, madame, that such qualities are very rare.

I do not know where Meta found the time to do all she did without appearing the least over-busy. Lulu's education was not a sinecure ; and yet she undertook, along with it, the housekeeping. Madame de Mauserre was too good-natured to govern a house properly. Her only ambition was to see happy faces around her. I remember, one day, when the rain had driven us for refuge into a wretched inn in the

suburb of Rome, she ate up to the last morsel a detestable omelet, merely that the feelings of the innkeeper might not be wounded. She confessed to this weakness herself. "When I have scolded my maid, and she looks cross," she said, "I hasten to make amends, *e m'avvilisco*."

Her servants, whom she spoiled, took advantage of it. Meta was not long in discovering that certain portions of the house-service were neglected, and that there was waste. On her remarks upon the subject, M. de Mauserre, who was not close with his money, but who loved order in everything, begged his wife to let Meta assist her in the government of the house, which in a short time was reformed, like Lulu. She had an eye on everything, in the laundry as well as in the pantry. Her mouse-like tread was constantly heard on the stairs, and the trail of her gray dress, which, without being new, was always so fresh and clean that it seemed just come from the hands of the mantua-maker, was sweeping noiselessly along the passages. The subalterns were not very willing, at first, to recognise her authority, and there was a good deal of ill-feeling and rude behaviour towards her; but Meta's patience here again triumphed, and she succeeded in disarming them by opposing to their sometimes wanton familiarity or bluntness an unalterable politeness. She possessed the gift of taming all sorts of animals; the very dogs of the château had made friends with her on the first day of her arrival. To rule was truly her vocation.

At six o'clock the mouse took off her gray vestments and put on a black-silk dress, which she relieved with a crimson bow; an ornament of similar colour was put in her hair, and this formed her dinner-toilet. She spoke very little during meals; her attention was chiefly directed to her pupil, whose exuberance of spirits required close watching. Between eight and nine o'clock she put Lulu to bed, and returned immediately to the drawing-room, where she was always im-

patiently expected. Everybody at Les Charmilles—M. de Mauserre especially—was passionately fond of music, and there was no other performer except Madame d'Arci, whose voice, though weak, was correct and agreeable. I cannot recollect a single instance of musical memory to be compared with Meta's; her head was a complete repertory of operas, oratorios, and sonatas. She played or sang all the airs she was asked, supplying as well as she could what she failed to remember; after which, to please herself, she would conclude her concert with a piece of Mozart's. Then her face would light up and her eyes sparkle, and it was then that, according to M. de Mauserre's expression, her ugliness became luminous. He had at last conceded to me that, no doubt, Velasquez and Rembrandt would have preferred this ugliness to beauty.

Three weeks after her arrival at Les Charmilles, Meta Holdenis had so well defined her place there, that it seemed as if she had always belonged to the household, and that it would have been impossible to get on without her. If, at the hours when we used to meet in the drawing-room, she was detained in her room, every one would say, on coming in: "Isn't Mademoiselle Holdenis here? Where is Mademoiselle Holdenis?" M. d'Arci himself, in his better moments, would confess that he began to be reconciled to the ideal. Madame de Mauserre was never tired of chanting the praises of this pearl of governesses; she called her her angel, and could not sufficiently bless the American Harris for having sent her this good, this amiable girl, this innocent heart, pure as a sky in spring-time. It was thus she gave vent to her enthusiasm. Of course, I was the last person to contradict her.

One day she took me aside, and told me, with a tremulous voice, that her conscience impelled her to *explain everything* to Meta, and begged me to do it. "I do not know," she added, "how people speak of us outside our own circle, but

I should be very sorry if Mademoiselle Holdenis learned through others who I am, and the misfortune attached to my daughter's birth. I hardly think that this revelation will change anything in her affection for us, of which she gives us such constant proofs; but, even if it were otherwise, loyalty obliges us not to let her ignore any longer what she should have known before entering this house." I told her that I approved of her scruples, and promised to fulfil the commission.

I found an opportunity for it the very next day. I had gone out toward four o'clock in the afternoon, and had come as far as Ville-Moirieu—a pretty little village, beautifully situated—when, on the hillock overlooking it, I happened to spy Mademoiselle Holdenis and her charge, who were taking an airing in the barouche. I called to them, and prevailed on Meta to alight and allow me to take her to a very pretty cemetery near by, close to a rustic church, and commanding one of the finest views around. She allowed herself to be persuaded, took Lulu by the hand, and walked along with me. The cemetery was well worthy of a visit; I had never before seen one so flowery and grassy. When we entered, a large weeping-willow was just casting over it a soft shadow, in which the sun was making a network of silver; everywhere roses and daisies in bloom; everywhere wandering and humming insects, whose music must certainly have delighted the dead without disturbing them. May it not be agreeable to the dead to hear above them, from the depth of their eternal repose, a vague hum of life, weaving dreams into their sleep?

We sat down upon a little wall covered with dry leaves. As Lulu did not find the place roomy enough for her frolics, I showed her, in the grass-plot adjoining the wall, a beautiful butterfly, and advised her to chase it; to which her governess, after some hesitation, consented.

I had sought this interview with Meta in order to impart to her the explanations to which I have referred, but it so happened that I began to talk to her about something entirely different. There are days, madame, when, without drinking a drop of wine, I get intoxicated. It is an ugly trick my imagination plays me ; it gets drunk on the mere pleasure of being alive—like the goldfinch from eating too many cherries. I had that same day dispatched a picture to the person who had ordered it, and, while nailing up the case, had declared that my work was good. Consider, also, that the weather was superb, and the heat tempered by a fresh breeze ; a few clouds, that wandered over the azure of the sky, cast their shadow on the meadows ; these travelling shadows looked like busy messengers in haste to carry to I know not whom happy news of I know not what. Add to all this that for four weeks disinterested judges had been constantly praising before me a person who formerly had recited to me “The King of Thule,” and who had allowed me to call her “Mäuschen”—can you wonder, then, that on the way I should have made certain reflections, turned over in my head certain *ifs*, certain *perhappses*, to which I answered, “Bless me ! and why not ?” Add to it, moreover, that Meta wore a new dress, maroon-brown, made for her by Madame de Mauserre’s maid, and which fitted her charmingly. Finally, be so good as to consider further that we were seated opposite each other, in the loveliest of cemeteries, and that, in raising my head, I could see right before me a large vase of myrtles. Madame, those myrtles, those clouds, that dress, and the rest, were what caused me, as soon as Lulu had left us, to point my finger at her and exclaim, heedlessly: “If Tony Flamerin had married Meta Holdenis six years ago, they would have had, by now, a prettier little thing than this to play with.”

The apse of the church made an echo, and this echo repeated, one after the other, all my words. Not expecting

anything of the kind, Meta started as if a fire-cracker had exploded in her hand. She bent over the wall to hide her blushing face. "Lulu, my darling," she cried, "you had better come back!" But Lulu was busy with her butterflies, and did not hear.

"Have I said anything improper?" I asked. "It seems to me that my remark was perfectly reasonable."

"Is it ever reasonable," replied she, curtly, "to regret a doubtful happiness that one has cast away?"

"Ah! now, if you please, which of us two cast it away?" said I; and with the end of my cane I drew upon the sand a wreath of violets, on which I traced the words, "Madame la Baronne Grüneck." She looked somewhat bewildered at both me and my cane, and then, as if a new light broke suddenly into her mind:

"And was it for that," she cried, folding her hands, "that you wrote below my portrait, 'She adores the stars and Baron Grüneck?' This wreath, this superscription—What! did you not recognise my sister Thecla's writing. It was a trick she had played on me, knowing how I disliked my handsome suitor. When you caught me, with my head in my hands, I was not in ecstasy, sir, as you imagined; I was meditating a vengeance against my frolicsome sister. How could you for a moment seriously believe—"

She stopped; the tears started to her eyes. She moved her finger along a fissure in the wall, scratching the moss away with her nail. Then, after a pause; "Do you wish me to tell you the real reason you had for not marrying Meta Holdenis? It was because poor "Mäuschen" was the daughter of a ruined man."

It was my turn now to start from my seat. "Has M. Holdenis," I asked, "recovered his fortune?"

"What a question! Would he ever have consented to part with me if it had not been a pressing necessity?"

“Very well, then ; there is no harm done. One of these days history will relate how Tony Flamerin, having found Meta Holdenis again after six years’ separation, took her to a pretty cemetery full of roses, and near a church where there was an echo, and asked her hand, which she granted him out of pure charity.”

She rose, and cried, as loud as she could, “Lulu, it is time to go !” Her emotion stifled her voice, and Lulu did not hear.

I obliged her to sit down again. “Do let Lulu and her butterflies alone,” I said, “and listen to me ! The deuce ! Honest explanations, Burgundy fashion, never hurt any one. I am not going to tell you that I adore you. I shall not describe to you the martyrdom of my amorous flame. In the first place, it would bore you dreadfully, and, in the second, it would be a lie. I have fancied myself in love several times, but in reality I have been so only once ; that was last year, in Madrid. The object of my adoration was a big painting by Velasquez, called the picture of ‘the Lances.’ This rascally picture put me, when I saw it, into a fever for ten days, and cost me ten sleepless nights. It was then I learned what godlike painting is ; but divine folly does not fill a man’s heart or existence. There are houses where they have once a week a feast fit for an emperor, and live the rest of the time on dry bread and scraps. Long live banquets ! but good, plain every-day fare has its value ; and the plain fare of the heart is a dear companion, such as I can now no longer do without—a mutual friendship, tender and faithful, accompanied by an imperious need of living together.

“Now, I declare to you in all frankness that never but once in my life have I met a woman who inspired me with the desire to live with her : and that is the person who is now seated on this wall by my side. She has all the intelligence, the wisdom, the gentleness of the strong, all the

charm of the humble ; in addition to all this, she is fond of gray, red and brown, my own favourite colours. As, up to this time, there has been invented but one honest means by which a man may live with a woman, and that is marriage, I have had—confound it !—from the first day that I saw you the desire to marry you. The idea seemed to me at first very stupid, but to-day it looks to me very sensible. Hang that Baron Grüneck ! If it had not been for him, you would be my wife now. But, pshaw ! what was not done may yet be done. And, after all, we have lost nothing by waiting. Formerly—how shall I put it ?—formerly I desired you more than I loved you ; now I love you more than I desire you. Besides, at that time I was nothing, and had nothing to offer you but empty pockets and a head full of wind. To-day I am not exactly the Great Mogul, to be sure, but I am somebody ; I have a name, a certain income. The boat is launched—hurrah !—and my wife can have all the money she wants.”

She listened to me very attentively, and in silence, with her head down and her eyes fixed on the ground. Her hands trembled slightly, and I could at times see her bosom swell under her neck-kerchief—all of which seemed to be good omens. At the word “money” a gesture of indignation escaped her. She pointed with the tip of her parasol to the four lines composed by the author of “Jocelyn” for one of his friends, and which were engraved in golden letters on a headstone near by :

“ Tout près de son berceau sa tombe fut placée,
 Peu d’espace borna sa vie et sa pensée ;
 Content de son bonheur, il sut le renfermer
 Autour des seuls objets qu’il eut besoin d’aimer.”¹

¹ “ Few steps between his cradle and his grave,
 His life and mind alike did little crave ;
 Yet happy he, for centred in his home,
 His modest wishes never sought to roam.”

"Poetry is a fine thing!" I exclaimed; "but a little property does not come amiss, and I promise you that my wife— There, now! I forget that my wife is not yet mine." Then bringing my head close to hers: "Dear little mouse of my heart, will you have me? If you say 'No,' I shall set out to-morrow for Paris, where I may or may not hang myself, just as I shall feel at that moment. If you say 'Yes,' I shall be in such transports of joy that I shall perform such caperings as you have never seen before; and I shall presently teach Lulu how easy it is to learn to walk on one's head. Perhaps you will ask for time. As soon as I shall have in my pocket an authentic promise, written and signed in due form, I will wait as long as you please. My hopes are of the patient sort."

She raised her head, and said: "German women have the disagreeable habit of speaking seriously of serious things, and this is why they are in such straits when they have to do with French people. It is so hard to know when a Frenchman jests and when he is serious! I say neither 'Yes' nor 'No;' I mistrust."

"Look at me!" I said, straightening my face; "look at me! a donkey under the lash is no more serious than I am now. And I declare to you, most pertinently too, that you are not going out of this cemetery until you have answered me."

With these words I took her hand. She tried to disengage it, but I held it tight. She looked for Lulu, and opened her lips to call her, but Lulu was far away in the sky. She had laid herself on her back, and was looking at the fleeting clouds; she was talking aloud to them, and, with the end of a long switch which she brandished in the air, was showing them the way they should go.

"No evasion," I continued; "you shall answer me. I mean to prove to you that a Burgundian suitor can be more

obstinate than even a German woman." And I added: "Sweet little hand that I hold in mine, which revealed Mozart to me, and once showed me all the stars in heaven, calling them every one by name, you have the wisdom to despise nothing, not even domestic duties. You possess all graces, perfections, and knowledge, and I declare that your destiny is to belong to me—that you have been created for my happiness—to point my life the way it should go—and to sew buttons on my gaiters! If ever I do anything to displease you, I shall give you my ears to box, and these boxes shall be most delicious. Little, soft, supple hand, that writhes in mine like a snake, will you be mine?—Speak—tell me your secret?"

She turned her large, candid eyes on me, and said: "You are a Frenchman, an artist, and you have forgotten me for six whole years. I ask time to reflect. If in two months—See, I am superstitious about anniversaries. Six years ago, on the 1st of September, 1863, we were seated, one evening, upon a bench; the night was beautiful, and you were talking nonsense to me. On the 1st of September of this present year let us meet again in this cemetery. These roses here will be dead; perhaps there will be others. We shall sit on this wall, as we do now, and I will then say 'Yes' or 'No.'"

"Agreed?" I replied, letting her go.

"And now you will allow me to call Lulu?"

"One moment yet," I cried; "Lulu has not done talking with the clouds, and I have not yet acquitted myself of a message I was requested to deliver. It is an adventure I have to relate, which will probably interest you."

She listened to my whole story with extreme attention. At the first words both face and attitude underwent a change. At times she frowned, or bit her lips, or dug into the ground with her parasol, or, resting her chin in her hand, would fix her eyes upon the horizon as if in search of something. When

I had finished, "You seem quite affected by my story," I said.

She answered that, if she had known it sooner, she should probably not have come to Les Charmilles, because she would never have been able to overcome her poor father's scruples. I thought to myself that her father was a curious sort of man to allow himself the luxury of scruples; and that, when I should be in my own house, and married, I should not allow his conscience to come to visit us. Then she quoted the German proverb, "He that gives me bread, I will sing his song."—" *Wess Brod ich esse, dess Lied ich singe.*" "It is hard to persuade the world," she added, "that one can disapprove of the principles of the people one loves and serves."

I answered her that the care of her reputation was henceforth altogether Tony Flamerin's; that she had nothing to fear on that score; that, moreover, M. and Madame de Mauserre had not sinned from principle; that a cruel fatality alone prevented their marriage, and that the day which should open to them the door of the church to solemnise it would be the happiest of their life.

She was in a lecturing mood, and she talked so prettily, in a learned and sententious tone, that it was far from disagreeable. "It is a very delicate task," she said, "to raise a child that owes its birth to a fault. How can I teach her to reconcile the respect for divine law with that she owes to her parents?"

I replied to her that Lulu was as yet but a very little girl, and that I did not see any particular necessity to explain to her the seventh commandment.

After having remained a few moments silent, she exclaimed: "Even should I wish to go now, I could no longer do it. A month has sufficed to attach me so strongly to this child, that it would be impossible for me to leave her.

It seems to me that I am responsible before God for her dear little soul."

"Responsible," I said, "till the 1st of September. As for the rest, there may be some means of arranging matters; and if your heart is so much interested in the little lady, you might, after our marriage, still continue her education. She could spend her winters in Paris, and we would spend the summers at Les Charmilles. Now, see, am I not an obliging husband?"

She did not seem to hear me; she continued to dig into the ground with her foot. She questioned me next about certain details of my story, which I had slightly skipped over, and which appeared to interest her. "It is a real novel," she said, "but the only adventures I take pleasure in are those where the hero and heroine are poor; M. and Madame de Mauserre are rich, very rich—are they not?"

"Madame de Mauserre left her dowry in the claws of her first husband, but she has since inherited some property from her father."

"To whom does Les Charmilles belong?"

"To M. de Mauserre. He owns, besides, two houses in Paris. At the risk of his losing your esteem, I must tell you that the poor man enjoys an income of two hundred thousand francs."

"You pronounce the word 'income' with so much emphasis," said she, smiling, "it quite fills your mouth! I assure you that when I was quite little I enjoyed only those stories in which hunger marries thirst. The one you have related to me would please me much more if M. and Madame de Mauserre had fled together, to live in a garret where they would have worked and loved.—Holy Poverty!" she exclaimed, with a kind of exaltation, "thou purifiest everything! Thou takest the place of innocence! Thou art poetry and happiness together!"

I was going to reply, when Lulu joined us. Meta made a few steps towards her, and, raising her up, pressed her to her heart with an impetuosity of tenderness that would have delighted Madame de Mauserre. We went back to the carriage, where they made room for me. The child was tired, and soon fell asleep. Meta took her in her lap. I tried repeatedly to renew the conversation; she answered me abstractedly. Her eyes were wandering over the country. She was in a dreamy mood. When we reached the gate, "Do you think," asked she, all at once, "that M. and Madame de Mauserre are happy?"

"They would be much *more* so if they could marry each other; but one gets accustomed to anything."

"Man is born for order," she replied; "and when he forgets it, order avenges itself."

It seemed to me that she was turning rather grave. I tickled her lips with the tip of a bur I had brought with me from the cemetery. "What sets my mind at rest in regard to this disorderly house," I said, "is that your closets will atone for it, and find favour in the sight of the Lord. They are always in such perfect order, that the host of cherubim in the highest heavens must take infinite pleasure in contemplating them."

She snatched the bur from my hands, and said: "If you wish to please me you must try to be less of a Frenchman and less of an artist. Promise me," she added, "that you will speak to no one of what has passed between us to-day, and that you will not even mention the matter to me before the 1st of September."

I answered her with one of the couplets she had admired. "Have no fears," said I;

" 'Yet happy he, for, centred in his home,
His modest wishes never sought to roam.' "

At dinner, and during the whole evening, she redoubled

her respectful attentions toward Madame de Mauserre ; she seemed to wish to prove to her that, although she knew all, she esteemed and loved her none the less. She overdid it ; for, in wishing her "good-night," she took her hand and pressed it humbly to her lips.

"Ah, my dear," said Madame de Mauserre, "this is the first time since you came that you have done anything to displease me. Let me show you how friends kiss each other." And she kissed her tenderly on both cheeks.

IV.

ALTHOUGH Meta Holdenis knew so well how to regulate her work that she had always plenty of time to accomplish whatever she wanted to do, she could not find, in six weeks, a single moment to give your servant a second *tête-à-tête*. She did not look as if she wished to avoid me, but she did not seek me. An instructress cannot be too careful, I suppose.

Besides, an increase of duties absorbed what little leisure she had. M. d'Arci left us to spend some time at a country-seat he had inherited in Touraine, and Madame d'Arci went to join him a few days later. Her father much regretted her departure. He had almost finished the first two volumes of his "History of Florence," and intended to publish them as soon as a fair copy could be made. As he had been told to spare his eyes, which were very weak, his daughter had offered to recopy the manuscript, which was full of erasures, words written over another, and additional notes, through all of which she knew how to find her way. On her departure he thought of engaging a secretary, when Meta offered her services. He refused at first, but finally accepted, and was soon delighted with his new copyist. Meta, besides

having a clearer handwriting, was more intelligent than Madame d'Arci ; but what pleased him most was the extreme pleasure she took in her noble task. She became so infatuated with it that she could hardly lay it aside. She thought the "History of Florence" admirable, and the historian a very great man. These are things which an author is not unwilling to hear often. There are some who regret that they are not able to pension all who admire them ; but not every one is gifted to the same degree with the talent of admiration. Voice and gesture are not sufficient. The eye must come to aid them. It must accentuate the praise, and its caresses must inflict upon the modesty of the patient a delicious torture. Meta's look was a speaking look. Saint Simon said of a great lady of his time, who had meddled with great affairs, that she was "a brunette with blue eyes which constantly expressed all she wished to say." Meta Holdenis resembled this great lady a good deal.

She rendered M. de Mauserre another still more essential service : she all but saved his life. His nerves often troubled him. To soothe them, he would ride on horseback in the evening and scour the country round. The fatigue would induce sleep. During one of these nocturnal rides he took cold, and this cold terminated in a pleurisy which became alarming. Madame de Mauserre wished, at first, to nurse him, and sit up with him entirely herself ; but her strength soon gave way, and she had to call upon Meta for assistance. The patient growing worse, she was so beside herself with anxiety that the physician forbade her to approach him. It was proposed that Madame d'Arci should be recalled, but Meta assured them that she could do anything that was needful ; and she kept her word. When he had experienced the charm of being nursed by her, M. de Mauserre, who, when he was sick, was really a spoiled child, would no longer take anything except from her hand, nor suffer any one else to come

into his room. She not only possessed considerable knowledge in medicine, and knew all about potions and juleps, having treated her brothers and sisters in a number of serious cases; she had also the gentleness, patience, the noiseless tread, the supple hand, and the indefatigable smile of an accomplished nurse. Fatigue did not tell on her. After a whole night's watching, she could fall asleep on a chair and wake in an hour again as fresh and lively and as rested and cheerful as ever. That's what comes of loving God and one's fellow-men! Such sentiments work miracles.

All this trouble met with its reward. M. de Mauserre became convalescent and recovered rapidly, as do all nervous natures, which sink and rise again suddenly. One morning, after breakfast, leaning upon the arm of Mademoiselle Holdenis, and preceded by Lulu, who had promised to be good, he succeeded, with the help of a few rests, for which Meta had provided by carrying a camp-stool with her, to walk around the park. Madame de Mauserre could not sufficiently express her gratitude to Meta for her kind care and devotion. Wishing to give her some slight proof of her gratitude, she requested Madame d'Arci, who on her return was to pass through Lyons, to buy there the prettiest gold watch, set with diamonds, she could find. It was to take the place of the humble silver one by which this excellent girl reckoned the hours of her life so usefully employed.

On the day when M. and Madame d'Arci arrived at Les Charmilles I was obliged to leave in my turn, being called to Paris on business: one of my pictures was to be sold, and I was desirous of putting a few final touches to it. Meta, whom I saw a moment before my departure, wished me a happy journey; but she did not ask me when I should return—an omission which seemed to me an excess of discretion. I had scarcely been a week in my studio in Paris when I received a letter from Madame d'Arci, requesting me

to do an errand for her. The last line of her letter read as follows: "We have particular reasons (my husband and I) for wishing that you would hasten your return." This post-script surprised me; I did not know I was so necessary to Madame d'Arci's happiness. I had not intended returning to Les Charmilles before the end of the month, but, to oblige them, I hastened my departure, and left a few days earlier. On arriving at the château, Madame d'Arci met me on the front steps and whispered, "There are certain things going on here that displease us."

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"Watch," she replied, "and see for yourself. I hope we may be mistaken."

I could not see anything going on, at first, that was worthy of notice; however, gradually, whatever arithmetic may say to the contrary, nothings added to nothings grow sometimes into somethings. M. de Mauserre was entirely recovered, and was again busy with his "History of Florence;" but, notwithstanding his daughter's return, he had not re-established her in her former capacity of copyist.

I have told you that Meta's handwriting was superior to Madame d'Arci's. I observed, also, that he had kept up the habit of taking, every morning after breakfast, a long walk in the park—two hours long, sometimes—in which Meta and Lulu alone accompanied him. If a third joined them, he was at once made to feel, by M. de Mauserre's coldness of manner and abstraction of mind, that he was not wanted. His temper was less equable than before his sickness; he was often sombre and taciturn, and his fits of melancholy were followed by a forced merriment. When a man has had the pleurisy, it is quite natural that his temper should show the effects of it; and then, there is much to be forgiven to an historian who is endeavouring to elucidate some controverted points in the conspiracy of the Pazzi. Meta herself

was not in her usual frame of mind. She was absent-minded ; her eyes would wander about without fixed purpose ; at times she was agitated, at others stiff. There were moments when she would take long breaths as if there was not air enough in the room for her lungs or her hopes. Still, it took a M. d'Arci to imagine that she could entertain any hopes. It was much more natural to suppose that the fatigues of nursing and sleepless nights were telling on her health.

On the evening of my arrival, as she was singing, in the most bewitching of manners, I forget now what air in "Don Giovanni," she was all at once seized with a nervous attack. She became very pale, and threw herself suddenly back. Fortunately, M. de Mauserre was just then standing near enough to receive her in his arms and carry her to a chair. Can any one carry a woman without taking her round the waist ? Perhaps, after laying down his burden, he was a little too long in disengaging his arms ; but, at fifty, a man has no longer the agility of youth. The next morning the merciless M. d'Arci jested about Meta's fainting-fit, but his father-in-law retorted sharply to his taunts.

I am quite certain, however, that Madame de Mauserre had not the least suspicion of anything ; she wore her everyday face, her beauty and smile undisturbed. She believed in her husband as you believe in God, madame. He was to her a supernatural being, superior to all common weaknesses, whose loyalty was as inviolable as that of Jupiter when he had sworn by the Styx. And then this crystal soul fancied that every one was as transparent as herself, and that what was concealed from her did not exist. But did they conceal anything from her ? I was much disposed to believe that Madame d'Arci espoused too blindly M. d'Arci's prejudices. M. de Mauserre had said to her, one day, before me, "Oh, you, my dear ! if M. d'Arci assured you in his decisive tone

that he could see the stars in broad noonday, you would yourself, after a little hesitation, distinctly see the whole Milky Way, without a missing star."

On the 29th of August, in the afternoon, I went to my studio, which, as you know, was on the first story of an isolated tower, and a few hundred steps from the château. I had resumed my picture of Boabdil with renewed ardour. In order to make sure that no one should come to disturb me in my work, I bolted the door of the tower and removed the key from the lock. I had been painting for half an hour or so, when the wind brought me, through the half-open window, a murmur of voices and steps. It was M. de Mau-serre and Meta, who, accompanied by the child and her nurse, were coming back from their usual walk. The tower occupied the centre of a platform which looked upon the château ; at one of the extremities there was a hammock and a swing. Lulu asked her nurse to swing her ; I heard at first only her loud bursts of laughter. Soon it appeared to me that two persons were approaching. They knocked at the door and tried to open it. I kept still. They withdrew, thinking, no doubt, that the studio was deserted ; it contained, however, a pair of ears that were all attention, and which fancied, moreover, that they had a right to be so.

While Lulu was swinging, the two persons who had been trying to get into the tower began to walk up and down the platform. As they came and went, I could catch, now and then, bits of their conversation. They were at first but unmeaning words, but by-and-by I caught a whole sentence. A very sweet voice was speaking, "Never did any one read men better."

They came still nearer, and stopped right under my window. The same sweet voice said : "Ah, sir, you are not only born to write history, but to make it ! Why am I not queen or empress ? It is to Les Charmilles I should come

to find my premier. I would tear him from his retreat, and tell him that superior men owe themselves to society; that God does not allow them to bury the talents he has given them."

M. de Mauserre retorted quickly: "You are cruel! Do you not see that you reopen a half-closed wound?"

"Pardon me," she replied, in a tone of contrition; "I spoke unawares. I had forgotten—"

"You have a right to make me suffer," he said again. "Do I not owe my life to you?" There was a pause, after which M. de Mauserre spoke a long time in a low tone. I could not seize upon a single word, except the conclusion, which he somewhat emphasised: "When I made this sacrifice I did not calculate all its extent."

Thereupon they resumed their walk. This was, then, the kind of conversation they indulged in, in these park promenades, thought I, as I picked up the brush I had dropped. A few minutes later they had come back to my window, and I listened again: "You speak of compensations," said M. de Mauserre. "I know but one, and that is, that one gets old, and that a time comes when one considers one's self no longer worthy of one's own regrets."

"No, no, sir; do not say so. That time is far off yet."

"Well, now, how old do you take me to be?"

"Indeed, I don't know. You must be—Madame de Mauserre and you—she a little under, you a little over forty."

He began to laugh a little laugh that came from a well-pleased heart. "You don't read ages well. Take off ten from hers, and add twelve to mine, and you will have the correct figure for us both."

"What a false index your face is, then!" replied she. "But no, I accuse it wrongly; it tells the truth. You have the eternal youth of heart and mind, and you will never be old."

She interrupted herself to call to the nurse, who was swinging Lulu, "Take care—not so high!" Then she continued, pointing to the child: "Here, here is the compensation I was speaking of. You live again in this dear child, who resembles you, and you only. Alas! here I touch upon another wound; may this one soon be closed, and the day come when Lulu shall be entirely your daughter!"

He gave a blow with his cane against the threshold of the tower, and answered, sharply: "If you understood the law, you would know that to be impossible."

They remained so long out of the reach of my ears, that I was afraid I should hear nothing more. It would have been a pity, for their conversation interested me. Fortunately, Lulu was no less interested in her swing; the consequence was that they had time to come once more round, and that, five minutes later, I heard a grave voice saying, "You think, then, that she also suffers from it?"

"She is so good, sir," replied the flute-like voice, "that she conceals from you her regrets, her weariness, her chagrin. She was made for the gay world—to shine—to be admired. To judge from her portrait, she must have been marvellously beautiful."

I was on the point of running to the window and crying out, "And, if you please, she is still the handsomest woman in France!"

I forbore, and M. de Mauserre had time to put to Meta some question I could not catch. She answered: "You embarrass me, sir. Love is so exacting a sentiment, so selfish, that it rarely considers the sacrifices it imposes. It seems to me, however, that if I had the terrible misfortune to be an obstacle in the career of the man I loved, God would give me the strength to leave him—to sacrifice myself to him, happy if his gratitude and affection came to seek me sometimes in my solitude."

This time I uttered, half loud, "Just listen to this serpent's tongue!"

"I think I heard some one speak," said M. de Mauserre; and he called, "Tony, are you up there?" I did not breathe a word.

"You were mistaken; I heard nothing," answered Meta.

A short time after, she called Lulu and told her that it was time to go back to the house. As the child did not seem inclined to leave her play, she ran to fetch her, and ordered the nurse to take her away; then she came back to M. de Mauserre, who was waiting for her, seated, I believe, on a stone seat a few steps from the tower. "Sir," said she to him, "I have a confidence to make to you; I want to ask your advice. I hardly know how to begin."

He replied, in the most gracious tone: "I conceal nothing from you, and I should be happy to think that I have your confidence, as you have mine."

She got entangled in a long preamble, which he begged her to abridge. "What is the use of all this? Let us come to the point, I beg," he said. At last she determined to begin her story, but spoke so low that only a few syllables reached my ear. I thought I heard her use my name repeatedly. M. de Mauserre seemed apparently very much affected by her story, for he exclaimed, from time to time: "Is it possible! I should never have imagined such a thing!"

When she had done, as he remained silent, she asked him whether she had unawares said something that could have troubled or offended him. He replied, sharply: "What does your heart say?"

"How can I tell?" she answered. "I am afraid I do not quite understand him."

Then, after another pause, "Do you love Tony or not?" he asked, with the same vivacity, in which some anger was perceptible.

The answer was so indistinct, that, to my great regret, I could not catch it.

“Do you wish me to advise you?” he continued, more calmly. “I, too, am embarrassed now. You were speaking, a moment ago, of the selfishness of love; friendship is selfish, too. We have known each other three months only, and your society has become to me so sweet, that I shudder at the thought of having to give it up; the charm of our intercourse has become too great, too dear to me. And yet I am willing to forget myself, and think only of your own interests. I am very much attached to the man you speak of; he has rendered me services I shall never forget. But, whatever his merits may be, I doubt if you could be happy with him. He is an artist, and wholly absorbed in his art. Painting and glory are his two mistresses; his wife will always be subordinate to these. Allow me to express my whole thought: you would be for some time his plaything, to become afterward merely his housekeeper. My friendship wishes for you a husband who would share in all your tastes and sentiments—who would appreciate your worth, your rare intelligence—a man that could understand your character, so solid and so supple at the same time, and appreciate that charming flexibility of mind which allows you to enter so well into thoughts the most strange to you, and live, as it were, in the mind of others. This husband you will meet some day, and he will make of you his favourite companion, the confidant of his thoughts, his adviser and friend, in the most intimate and sweetest sense of the word.”

These last words were pronounced with so much warmth, that Meta was considerably moved. “Then you advise me to refuse him?” she asked. “In three days I must decide.”

“If you will believe me, do not go to Ville-Moirieu on the 1st of September. It will be best. It will be easy for you

here to avoid an interview with M. Flamerin. If he becomes too pressing, you have but to ask me to take the matter in hand."

"Let it be, then, as you say!" replied she, in the submissive tone of a Carmelite about to take the veil.

Curiosity getting the better of me, I crept to my window and raised a corner of the curtain. Either I did not see right, or M. de Mauserre took Meta's hand and slightly kissed the tips of her fingers. Her face was half turned towards me, and I could see the radiance of her brow, and her half-opened lips breathing the emotion of secret joy. Thus smiles the labourer, when, after painful sowing and the rigour of an obstinate winter, he sees the corn sprout, and contemplates hopefully the harvest he intends putting into his barns. A moment after, I saw nothing more: they were gone.

I sank into an arm-chair, where I remained a while motionless; my arms felt benumbed, my head heavy, my eyes dead. Suddenly, by an effort of will, I found myself again on my feet, feeling my body all over like a man that has fallen from a height without killing himself, and who assures himself that he is still in possession of all his limbs. After this rapid examination, I walked twice round my studio and whistled. I felt happy to find that I could still whistle. I remembered that it was at Dresden I began to cultivate this talent. I thought of Rembrandt's portrait, and Rembrandt made me think of Velasquez. I seemed to hear a voice crying: "This is the only god that does not deceive!"

I opened the drawer of a table, took from it an old meerschäum I had inherited from my father, filled it with tobacco, lighted it, and was surprised to hear myself exclaiming, "Oh, cooper of Beaune, thy son is all right!" Then I sat down before my easel and retouched the drapery of my Boabdil. Truth obliges me, however, to confess that my

brush was a little shaky, and that my mahl-stick had never before been so necessary.

At the end of an hour some one knocked again at the tower. This time it was neither M. de Mauserre nor Meta; I found myself, on the contrary, face to face with the boldest, darkest of gipsies. She had eyes like ink-spots, and the sly look of a night-bird scared by the light. I had met this beauty, in the morning, amid the stragglers of the gipsy band which had made our dogs bark so. I was smitten with her devilry, her scoundrel graces, and had invited her to come and sit for me in my studio. I hastened to let her in, delighted that she had kept her word. Heaven sent me in her person a model and a companion I was very much in need of just then. While sketching her, I took pleasure in talking with her. I have already told you, madame, that, whenever I meet in good society certain virtues, I am always seized with a sacred tenderness for the despised classes. To be sure, these sudden revulsions of feeling are often dangerous.

The sun was on the decline when I closed my sitting and went out with my model. As we crossed the platform, I perceived, at the foot of the swing, a brilliant object: it was Lulu's locket, which she had lost while swinging. I picked it up, and at the same instant I spied Meta at the other end of the larger thicket. She was coming toward us with bent head, casting her eyes around her, and stopping at times to ferret in the bushes. I whispered a few words to the gipsy, and slid a gold piece into her hand. There was no need of very lengthy explanations; she was well trained, and the gold she held in her crooked fingers, and contemplated with a smile, was a sufficient stimulant for quickness of sight and understanding. By paying her well, madame, you could have made her learn Chinese in a week.

She and I were half concealed by the bushes. Meta,

absorbed in her search, came close up to us without seeing us. "I forgot my appointment," said I aloud to the gipsy. "It is too late now; we must put off our sitting till to-morrow."

Lulu's governess stopped short, disconcerted. It was evident that it was not me she was looking for in the bushes. She did not seem pleased with the meeting, and was about beating a retreat, when I cried: "Lulu lost her locket; here it is."

She thanked me, and came up to take it. Before handing it to her, I added: "Allow me to introduce you to this daughter of Egypt. Isn't she lovely?"

But she did not relish the black beauty. She gave her a severe and uneasy look. You might have taken her for a dove, asked for her opinion about a raven.

"This is a creature," I said, "possessed of all vices, but who, nevertheless, is not lacking in a certain kind of honour. She lies like a lacquey, but she is not false; she gives herself out for what she is. She believes neither in God nor devil, and for that reason she never takes the one for the other. I grant you that she is as greedy as a pike, as amorous as a cat; but mind! she loves men one after another, and her heart does not sing two airs at the same time. To finish my picture of her, I shall tell you that she stole, this morning, three hens and two ducks; but I give you my word of honour that she has never trespassed upon the happiness of others—that she has never cheated them out of what they loved."

Then turning toward the gipsy: "Prophetess of my heart!" I cried, "you have never read Jean Paul, nor his treatise on the 'Education of Woman!' You will always be commonplace and deplorably low, but I believe in your sagacity as far as the things of this world are concerned. Just now you have announced to me what is going to

happen the day after to-morrow, in a cemetery where there are roses. Now oblige me by revealing to the lady here present her destiny also."

Meta gave me an angry look, and tried to run off. I barred the way, and took hold of her left hand. "Gitanilla," I cried, "tell me the secret of this hand, which I could not guess."

The daughter of Egypt advanced with a gesture of astonishment. She seemed plunged in so profound an admiration that Meta was struck by it, and yielded to curiosity. She consented to put her hand into that of the gipsy, but looked away and smiled with pity, as if out of sheer kindness only she were lending herself to a child's play she did not approve of.

I assure, you, madame, that it was a scene fit for a painter. With its sinister and profound look, the raven had magnetised the dove. It sang in Spanish, in a harsh, triumphant voice: "Little beauty, little beauty with silver hands, thou art a dove without guile; but sometimes thou becomest terrible as the lioness of Oran, as the tigress of Ocagna. Thou hast a sign on thy face—how lovely it is! Sweet heaven! I think I see the moon shine. Little beauty, God preserve thee from sudden falls; they are dangerous for ladies that wish to become princesses!"

At this moment the setting sun lit up strongly the whole château and set all its windows a-glittering. Its four machicolated towers with their turrets; its terrace with its baluster of white marble, ornamented with two monumental lions spouting water from their mouths; the horse-shoe flight of steps leading up to it; its arched bay-windows, traversed on the front by large stone mullions; its high attic, with pilasters the sharp edges of which stood out against an opal sky blended with green—all swam in a bright and soft light. The gipsy still sang on:

Hermosita, hermosa,
La de las manos de plata,
Eres paloma sin hiel,
Pero a veces eres braba.
Un lunar lienes : que lindo !
Ay Jesus, que luna clara !

Suddenly changing her voice, she exclaimed, in a clear tone :
“Señorita, you will live a hundred years. There are hearts that never wear out.”

Then, making a comprehensive gesture, embracing park and château within the circle which her forefinger described, she softly murmured : “These oaks, these groves, these towers, these weather-vanes, these lions—all, all these, fair one, shall one day be thine !”

I looked at Meta. I saw her eyes gleam ; but she hastened to drop their lids, feeling that I was looking at her ; and, somewhat disturbed, she quickly turned her back on me, to conceal her confusion and blushes. The gipsy, meanwhile, did not let go her hand, which she continued to examine. Suddenly she frowned, moved her finger slowly over two lines that crossed each other, and cried, with a wild laugh of scorn : “Señorita, a little advice : Do not chase two hares at once.”

With these words she tore away with incredible speed along the avenue of trees, carrying with her my gold piece, which she had well earned. Meta, I believe, was on the point of calling her back ; but, recovering herself, she overcame her emotion, like a person accustomed to command herself, and, refusing the arm I offered her, she turned toward the house. I walked by her side. There was in her look a strange flicker, and she walked so fast that one would have thought she meant to go to the end of the world.

“Well,” said I, “is not my gipsy a clever little body ?”

“I cannot understand,” replied she, with her usual gentle-

ness, "how a man like you can interest himself in a fortune-teller, or take pleasure in her silly trade."

"Who says the trade is a silly one? Some believe in chiromancy, others in great and small prophets—for we must believe in something. You know, better than I, what is meant by biblical lot-casting, for I am sure that you practise it. Little biblical as I am, I ventured to open the Holy Book at hazard this morning, and as your future, which is somewhat mine, interests me particularly, I decided that the passage on which I should chance to fall should concern you. Now, this is the verse upon which my first glance fell: 'God said to Abraham: I will give unto thee the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan for an everlasting possession.' Is this not a very striking coincidence? The bible and the gipsy seem to agree in their prophecies."

She answered, drily: "You do not try to please me; you know very well that I cannot endure this kind of jesting."

And, with that, she hurried on, and reached the house all out of breath. While ascending the front steps after her I hummed between my teeth Heinrich Heine's lines, which you know: "Upon the pretty eyes of my love have I composed the most beautiful romances, and upon her little mouth the best tercets, and on her little cheeks the most magnificent stanzas. If my love had but a little heart, I should have composed on it a pretty sonnet."

V.

THE next day, towards evening, a servant came to tell me that Madame de Mauserre wished to see me in the drawing-room. I hastened to comply with the request, and found there a woman almost beside herself, who, in her confusion,

could find nothing to say but, "Ah, Tony, my dear Tony! if you knew—" Fearing somebody might see her in this state, she took me into an adjoining room, which served her as a sitting-room, and there, sinking down on a sofa, she drew from her pocket a letter she had just received, and which she handed me to read. It contained the following words: "I hope, Lucy, to be able to announce to you very shortly the happiest of news."

"What do you think it means?" she asked, fixing her eyes on me, which revealed all the disorder of her mind.

"It's plain enough," I said, "and I am about as glad as you. It means—"

"Don't say it, Tony!" interrupted she, putting her hand on my lips. "And yet—yes, why not? It is so, and you are not mistaken; it means that very thing. I was so far from expecting it, that I experienced, just now, a surprise, and, if I must confess, such a transport of joy, that— But is it not very wrong in me to rejoice thus over the expected death of a man whom I should at this moment be nursing, or weeping over? We were not suited to each other, to be sure, and he made me exceedingly unhappy. He was very ill three years ago. I wrote to him, and told him that I forgave him everything, and that I begged him to forgive me also. I assure you, Tony, there was much feeling in my letter; it was kind, and he ought to have said, in reading it, 'She is better than I thought.' But, instead of that, do you know what he did? Why, he made one of his mistresses answer me; and this answer was so harsh, so insulting, that I cried over it a whole week. Now I cry again, but it is from joy. Truly, Tony, am I not very wicked?"

"I am still more so than you, for my joy is unalloyed that at last this old scoundrel has to give up his fine soul to God."

She made me a beseeching gesture. "Hush! hush, Tony!

there are words that bring ill luck." To conjure their bad effect, she half praised her brutal husband. "Besides," she continued, "have I a right to blame any one? They might well say to me, 'And what have you yourself done that is so virtuous and rare?' And they would be right; for really, Tony, the man we both avoid naming is merely guilty of having tried to be as happy as possible. He did it in his own way, to be sure, which was not a handsome one; but I have done just the same. One day, when I was sad, happiness passed by, singing before my window; it beckoned me, and I followed it to Italy and to Les Charmilles. Here we are, he and I, every morning more delighted than ever to be together. There are moments when I ask myself what I could possibly have done to deserve this happiness, and I become uneasy, not finding in my whole past a single laudable action."

"There was once an individual," said I, "who boasted that through his whole life long he had done but one wicked deed. Whereupon some one retorted, 'When will that end, though?' You, madame, are doing but one good deed, and that consists in making, every day, everybody around you happy—not excepting the poor."

"Oh!" exclaimed she, "the truly good actions are only those that cost an effort. You are too indulgent, Tony. I assure you that, if the Almighty consulted His justice alone, he would send me, instead of good news, a serious trouble."

"And I maintain that there is a justice in heaven, since the infernal rascal, whose name is too odious to pronounce, is finally brought to his end. Only one thing troubles me, and that is that he is not quite dead yet. We are selling the bear's hide before he is slain. If he should recover—hang it!"

"Dear me, yes!" she cried. "My poor mother is too much given to taking her wishes for realities. She has

several times given me false alarms, and I am very foolish to get so excited over so slight an assurance, which, after all, means nothing. I had better not say anything about this letter to M. de Mauserre—don't you think so, Tony? He would be beside himself with joy; and if to-morrow he was to learn that he rejoiced too soon, the disappointment would be too bitter."

"Oh, very bitter!" repeated I, energetically articulating and hammering out each word.

She threw her charming head back on the sofa-cushion, and closed her eyes for a few seconds, biting at the lace of her handkerchief; then, sitting up again: "They accuse me, and you the first of all, of being outrageously lazy. You are right; I can't help it; I was born so. And yet, through all that long laziness, my head is not idle; my thoughts are busy every way. Indeed, Tony, I am not near so thoughtless and careless as you think. Not a day passes in which I do not say to myself, 'Was I worthy that he should thus sacrifice his future to me?' What consoles me in this a little, a very little, is that at Dresden I spared no pains to dissuade him from this course—to make him give me up. He swore to me that he would never regret the step; and, really, I don't think he ever has done. My other great fault, after my laziness, is that I am too sensitive with regard to the opinion of society. Very often I was tempted to say to M. de Mauserre, 'Let us go to Paris; you will there be in the midst of all that interests you, surrounded by your favourite studies.' But I always lacked the courage. Paris frightens me. I fancy I should read the history of my life in every one's eyes. Indeed, my eyes are afraid of other people's eyes." And, folding her hands: "Ah, Tony, if, some day, I could be his wife!—if, some day, my arm in his, he could return to society, and soon to active life again!"

"Have confidence," I said; "it will all come."

She rose, and ran her fingers through her beautiful light-brown hair. Her hair, madame, curled so naturally that she had no need of dressing it; she had but to shake her head and it was all done. "I should like to be beautiful that day," continued she, "so that M. de Mauserre could be proud of me—so that everybody might exclaim, and say, 'It was a crazy thing to do—this elopement—but it was not silly!' Alas! it's I that am silly!" And pointing to her portrait, which hung opposite us, "Either you flattered me dreadfully five years ago, or I have lost the best part of my beauty. What do you think?"

She looked by turns into the glass and raised her eyes to the portrait, shrugging her shoulders; which did not prevent her from exclaiming, "After all, it seems to me that I am not so very ugly yet."

"You are the most candid, the most innocent, the most loving, and the prettiest of all women!" said I, kissing her hand with a warmth the cause of which she was far from suspecting.

I perceived, as I raised my head, that the door was open, and that Meta had just entered the room. When she desired it, she could walk so lightly and softly that no one could hear her coming. At this moment she looked ugly to me. There are landscapes which have nothing very enchanting in themselves, but which are made so beautiful, by certain effects of light, that one prefers them to more graceful and pleasing ones. The soul has also its certain effects of light, which transform a face, and it was for this reason that at given times Meta looked to me charming; but I had noticed that she seldom showed to advantage when Madame de Mauserre was by, not on account of a comparison it would be impossible to make, but because she felt uncomfortable in her presence; there was a restraint, a secret uneasiness she endeavoured to conceal. I had discovered the reason of it lately.

She looked at us with surprise, and the expression of her face was at the same time hard and embarrassed. "Do you know?" I asked, "what we were talking about? Madame de Mauserre maintains that she is not so pretty as her portrait."

"He who made the portrait is a great artist," replied she; "but he who made the model is more than an artist."

"That is something to be settled between heaven and me, I suppose," I retorted; "but portraits have the advantage of not growing old, and Madame de Mauserre insists that she is about to become an old woman at thirty."

"Ah, madame, of us two, I am the old woman; and yet I am only twenty-four," she replied, in a melancholy tone.

"You are both of you wicked flatterers," said Madame de Mauserre. "We were speaking, my dear, of something else besides. I received a letter—"

"Madame," said I, with a significant look, "King Louis XIV. used to say that we must not boast too soon of the future, for fear of depriving the event of the grace of novelty."

"That is what King Louis XIV. thought," replied Meta; "but M. Flamerin means by it that it is not well to trust everybody."

"What do you mean?" exclaimed Madame de Mauserre. "Whom should I trust, if not you? Here! read this letter quickly; I am sure you will share the emotion it has caused me."

She had not time, however, to hand it to her, or to add another word, for the dinner-bell rang, and Lulu, who was hungry, came to call us. During the meal M. d'Arcei gave full vent to his teasing and satirical temper. Whether from absent-mindedness or increase of modesty, Meta had come to the table in her gray morning-dress. He took her to task about it, and asked her why she liked gray so much—was it

from a particular love for gray sisters? She thanked him for the attention he paid to her toilet, and answered him that she had always been nick-named "Mäuschen;" that she was born a mouse, would die a mouse, and liked to wear its livery.

"This," said he, "explains to me many things. I have always thought that there are two kinds of ambitious people: the devourers and the gnawers. The first snap at a piece, the others nibble at it a long time with their little teeth."

"Explain, sir—explain!" she said, somewhat impatiently.

"Oh!" answered he, "your ambition is very laudable indeed; you only aim at conquering our hearts. There is no one here, from Lulu down to me, that doesn't adore you."

"Her secret is a very simple one," observed Madame de Mauserre; "she spends her life in forgetting herself, to think of others."

"That was exactly what I meant to say," retorted he, emptying his glass.

A moment after, he criticised the brown bow Mademoiselle Holdenis had put in her hair. He pretended that brown and gray didn't go well together; that the one was a true colour and the other a false one, and he called upon me to judge. I had not time to give my opinion, for M. de Mauserre spoke up, and declared that his son-in-law's remarks revealed the most fault-finding and dogmatic disposition he had ever known; and M. d'Arci cut short his compliments, reserving them for another time, for he knew from experience how far he could go.

Two hours later we were in the drawing-room. Meta had just gone out to put Lulu to bed. A servant entered, and handed Madame de Mauserre a note. She opened it, and uttered a loud cry; she had tears in one eye and laughter in the other. She rose, and, with tottering steps, ran to throw

herself on M. de Mauserre's neck. Her sobs drowned her voice. At last she succeeded in saying, "Alphonse, I am free!"

He disengaged himself from her embrace somewhat quickly. Curiosity makes one impatient. He caught up the dispatch; the contents made him start. A great surprise may produce such effects. Then he opened his arms to his wife, and said, "He has kept us waiting long enough."

As you see, madame, it is not always true that the first impulse is the best. Meta, meanwhile, came back into the drawing-room. Madame de Mauserre ran to her, and, holding out the note, cried, "Do come, mademoiselle, and read this!"

Meta read it in her turn. She could govern her tongue, but not always her face, and, to employ an old expression, she had not complete mastery over the little imps that served her; they would betray her sometimes. I thought I had seen, the day before, the same jet of flame in her eyes. She became in an instant as pale as death, and I thought she was going to faint. M. d'Arci watched her with me; the darkest of smiles was playing round his lips. She got out of it by throwing herself upon Madame de Mauserre and kissing her at such length that M. d'Arci said, at last, "If you please, Mademoiselle Meta, you may kiss people, but not smother them." Then, describing a quarter of a circle, and advancing toward Madame de Mauserre, he added, "Dear madame, be pleased to accept the heartfelt congratulations of your son-in-law."

"Thank you!" answered Madame de Mauserre; "but we have ten months yet to wait."

"That's the law," said M. de Mauserre, with an air of resignation.

The poor woman embraced us all round, and ran to her room, where she shut herself in. Her happiness gave her scruples, her joy scared her; she felt the need of concealing

it, and, as she said, to speak of it only to Him who knew all things.

M. d'Arcei did not conceal his ; it was so noisy that, for some reason or other, it became annoying to every one. M. de Mauserre took up a newspaper ; I, a sheet of paper to draw on. A shadow suddenly interposed itself between the lamp and my pencil. I raised my eyes ; Meta was standing by me. She was no longer ugly ; her face was animated, her eye imbued with a feverish languor, her whole air coquettish. "May one know," she asked, in a whisper, "what the gipsy predicted to you?"

"In regard to what?"

"In regard to what is going to happen the day after to-morrow, in a cemetery where there are roses."

"She predicted to me that nothing would happen."

"Nothing at all?"

"Nothing at all."

"Why?"

"Because, the day after to-morrow, neither you nor I will go there."

"Neither you nor I!" said she. "The gipsy told but half the truth, for I shall certainly be there, and shall wait for you."

M. de Mauserre put down his paper and came up to us. I do not know what he could have heard of our conversation, but he said to Meta, in the most natural way : "Since we are all so happy, it seems to me but right that Lulu should have her share. She has been wanting, for a long time, to see Lake Paladru, which, if I remember well, is a charming lake. I have decided, Mademoiselle Meta, to take her there the day after to-morrow, the 1st of September.—You will go with us, won't you, Tony?" added he, in a manner more off-hand than encouraging.

"Certainly."

"And I, too, dear father," said Madame d'Arci.

"Since no one invites me," observed M. d'Arci, in his turn, "I invite myself."

I wrote in big letters on my paper, on which Meta had her eyes still fixed, "Chiromancy is not a lying art."

When I retired to my room, M. d'Arci ran after me in the hall, and, pulling me by my sleeve: "M. Flamerin," he whispered in my ear, "I shall have to speak with you to-morrow about some very important business."

VI.

THE next day it rained all the afternoon; M. de Mauserre and Mademoiselle Holdenis could not take their walk in the park. I took advantage of a clear moment to go to my studio, where I was to begin Madame d'Arci's portrait. She joined me there just as I had done putting the colours on my palette. Her husband accompanied her; he cried, slamming the door noisily: "Let us swear, M. Flamerin, not to leave this room before we have devised some means to get rid of this intriguer!"

His tone was so tragic that I asked him whether he intended employing the knife or poison.

"To exterminate a mouse," answered he, "I know nothing better than poison. If you know of gentler means, I am willing to examine them."

He installed himself in a smoking-chair. I pushed an arm-chair towards Madame d'Arci and took my seat on a stool at her feet, and the sitting began. One would have said, judging from our gravity, that we had come together for a council of war, to deliberate upon a plan for a campaign.

"How she betrayed herself!" said M. d'Arci.

"It is certain," I replied, "that she grew pale and lost countenance."

"She looked like a soul in trouble," added Madame d'Arci, "and the whole evening she kept moving about from one place to another, as if she could find no rest anywhere."

"That is a redeeming point in her favour," said I; "it proves that she is not quite yet mistress of the art of deceit."

"From the very first day that I saw her, her intentions looked suspicious to me. Her ugly German face has always displeased me."

"That proves, sir," I retorted, "that you are more farsighted than I, or that you have more prejudices. Her German face never displeased me."

"What I cannot understand is, that she should have succeeded in bewitching my poor father."

"That proves, madame, that you do not understand the sentiments a woman can inspire in a sick man whom she has nursed, and who has too impressionable a heart."

"But what has this intriguer in her favour, I should like to know? She is as ugly as night!"

"Ah, sir, you know I don't think so."

"Do you consider her mind so very brilliant?"

"Well, madame, not brilliant, exactly—useful, rather; and that is, perhaps, the better of the two."

"Say, rather, that her cleverness consists in vile cajolings and fawnings."

"Ah, sir, the best politicians often succeed through the coarsest means, because they take men for what they are—that is to say, big children."

"I do really believe that you are praising her!"

"Heaven forbid, madame! but a good general studies his enemy."

M. d'Arci made a motion of impatience, and I even believe that he gave vent to an oath. "We beat about the

bush," cried he, "and lose our time! I heartily agree with M. Flamerin, that the ingenious mind of Mademoiselle Holdenis is not one of those useless shrubs that ornament our gardens; I recognise in it, on the contrary, as he does, one of those good little fruit-trees, which, with the help of some care, a little rain, and much sunshine, make their owners good returns. But we have not come together here to discuss her savoury merits and virginal graces. Our common wish is to send her back, as soon as possible, to her dear Florissant—to her humble and virtuous home—to her tender father, who complains that during her absence his Mayence hams have lost all their poetry—to her charming little brothers, whose coats are certainly in rags since she is no longer there to darn them under the eye of the Lord. Are we worthy—we heathens—to possess this mystic dove? And what does she want here, among us Philistines?

"I can understand, M. Flamerin, why you are much less interested than we in the good work we meditate. We two are fighting, *pro aris et focis*; but you entertain so faithful a friendship for M. de Mauserre that it ought to stand in lieu of interest. Are we agreed? Well; then I will proceed. Without wishing to reproach you, my dear sir, I must remind you that you assured me, on your honour, that my father-in-law, who is over fifty-three years old, had sown all his wild oats, and that to the end of his days he would prove the most reasonable of men. It was upon the faith of this fine assurance that I consented to a reconciliation, on which, at first, I had but to congratulate myself. I was agreeably surprised by finding in the woman, who made him commit at the time the most unpardonable of follies, a person whose elevated and delicate sentiments inspired me from the first with as much esteem as affection. I have but one wish left in their behalf, and that is, that they may soon be able to legalise, by a regular marriage, a union which promised to

both a happy future. Since yesterday all legal obstacles have disappeared ; but an unpropitious moon has risen over Les Charmilles, and we are threatened with the most frightful of catastrophes. Do not shrug your shoulders. The case is serious ; we are in danger of seeing my wife's father disgrace himself by the most cowardly act of abandonment, and take to the altar Lulu's governess, who aspires to become the governess of Les Charmilles and all there is in it."

"Mercy on me!" cried I. "That is indeed desecrating fortunes from afar!"

"Be so kind as to listen to me to the end," he continued. "I am a staid man, and am not in the habit of getting excited about trifles. I declare to you that my father-in-law is completely weaned from his first love ; indeed, beautiful as Madame de Mauserre still is, her face is henceforth unpleasant to him—it is the face of a great folly, which prevented him from becoming ambassador to Constantinople or London. And there is the point ! people will not be sincere enough to confess to their absurdities. To his misfortune as well as ours, heaven and M. Tony Flamerin have brought here one of those hypocrites who, while they cast the most pious glances to the clouds, and have constantly one hand on their hearts, pick their neighbour's pocket with the other. Without speaking of her talent for preparing cooling drinks and dusting the house-furniture with special grace, this good-for-nothing adventuress has seduced our pensioned diplomatist by her attentions, her cat-like caresses, her clever flatteries, her sweet protestations, her sugar-plum airs ; by her never-ending admiration and her languishing eyes, which repeat to him from morning till night, in the purest German, that he is the greatest of men. Let him declare his passion to her if he chooses ; let her yield at discretion if she has a mind to—that is their affair, and I shall make no objection ; but this miniature Maintenon has taken it into her head to

marry him. She will play the dragon of Virtue, will always send him away dejected, but will take good care not to drive him to despair, and you will see how these manœuvres will end. Irritated by her mock virtue, he will one of these days leap the ditch, however deep it may be. A little shame is soon drunk. Do you suppose I shall accept this hussy for a mother-in-law? Thanks! That's asking too much of me, and I mean to go presently and see M. de Mauserre, and have a frank and peremptory understanding with him on the subject. Either this creature shall leave to-morrow, never to return again, or this very evening my wife and I will give up the place to her and leave ourselves. M. de Mauserre loves his daughter. I fancy that my little harangue will make some impression on him."

Madame d'Arci felt a little hurt by this somewhat off-hand speech, but she took care not to show it; she loved her father, but would have hanged herself rather than contradict her husband. She thanked me with a look, as she heard me retort as follows.

"My dear count, your premises seem to me altogether unwarrantable, and your conclusions very daring. M. de Mauserre is of a melancholy temperament; he is a hypochondriac, who has not obtained from destiny what he had hoped for, and fancies he has cause for complaint. You must also consider that he has reached an age when love is hardly anything more to men than the need of agreeable society; the women that please them are those who know how to pity or admire them, to amuse or console them. Now, it has pleased heaven, and an American who was at a loss for amusement—for Tony Flamerin washes his hands of the whole affair—to send us here a person who is neither a hussy nor an adventuress; insults have never proved anything, and Mademoiselle Holdenis is simply a very intelligent, skilful, and insinuating person, who possesses the art

of entering fully into people's feelings, and of sharing their quarrels with life. I do not deny that the charm M. de Mauserre is under might carry matters very far, if he were to give way to it, nor that Mademoiselle Holdenis is an ambitious woman, whose imagination caresses certain dreams which seem to be quite in accordance with her religion. Let us state the worst: if Madame de Mauserre were to die to-morrow, you might perhaps have some difficulty in preventing your father-in-law from marrying his daughter's governess. He is of too liberal a mind, and considerations of fortune and birth would never keep him from following his inclinations. I know no man more free from prejudice than he. Fortunately, Madame de Mauserre is alive, and very much alive; and M. de Mauserre is a man of honour, who considers his word sacred. What I fear, my dear sir, is an awkward intervention, which would irritate him and spoil all. He belongs to the race of the high-minded. If he yields sometimes to his own reflections, he has, on the other hand, very little regard for the reflections of others, and his pride will never accept lessons from other people. For heaven's sake, give up the idea of lecturing him, and let him alone! Your too plain explanations would drive him to passionate and unreasonable acts, and perhaps he might then grant to his anger what he would surely refuse to his passion, since you persist in thus styling a mere fondness for a person who, through her manners and fine mind, is better able than we are to keep him company."

"I think that M. Flamerin is right," Madame d'Arcei hastened to say, after a side-glance at her husband to see how far she might venture. "It is possible that we look too much on the dark side of things, my dear Albert, and that the peril is not as imminent as we think. And yet, can nothing be done, M. Flamerin? Shall we allow the malady to take its own course, without applying any remedy? It is

a dreadful feeling to have the enemy thus installed in the place, and make no effort to drive him out. Surely we ought to do something to rid my poor father of his lady-companion, who is certainly not a lady of honour. If M. d'Arci's intervention seems dangerous to you, suppose we reveal the case to Madame de Mauserre. I am sure that her representations would be listened to; a love does not last six years without leaving some fire beneath its ashes. Let us go to her; let us open her eyes; let us cure her of her blind confidence, which is the real danger, and let us seek, with her, the means of driving, without too much noise, these dangerous blue eyes, which threaten such storms, from the premises."

"Oh, madame, you make me shudder!" cried I. "Don't you see that this confidence, which you call blind and which I think adorable, is our only plank of safety? It is through and by this very confidence that Madame de Mauserre keeps, without suspecting it, the secret machinations of Mademoiselle Holdenis in check, and deprives M. de Mauserre of all power to wish, hope, or even devise anything. Would any man with a heart betray a woman who believes in him as she does in the Almighty? To disabuse her would be ruining all. At the first word that would enlighten her, she would lose her senses—would be crazed with anxiety and trouble. Expect from her neither prudence, nor calmness, nor skill: she would break loose, and only play into the enemy's hands. A strange way, this, to make a breach into the besieged place which you wish to save!"

"You reject everything we propose!" replied M. d'Arci, getting cross. "Find, at least, some expedient or other; or I shall revert to my own good remedy—that is, rat-poison."

"I beg you to let me manage the whole affair."

"And what will you do?"

"I mean to cause the besieger to raise the siege."

“By making an appeal to her exquisite sensibility, or to the delicacy of her soul?”

“No, in another way. Do not ask me how; it is my secret.”

“And you promise us to succeed?”

“I shall do my best. Promise me, on your side, not to say anything about it to Madame de Mauserre, and even to show a good face to Mademoiselle Holdenis.”

He answered me that it was asking of him a great deal, but that he would consent to try first my experiment, after which, if it did not succeed, he would go back to his, and make an end of it. He went out twisting his moustache, and humming the favourite song of the great Frederick :

“I shall treat her, biribi,
In the fashion of barbari,
My friend.”

Towards evening the rain ceased, and the weather cleared up. The next morning, when we awoke, there was not a cloud in the sky. Six o'clock had not yet struck when two carriages, each drawn by three stout horses, awaited us before the gate of the terrace. Every one was prompt at the rendezvous, not excepting Madame de Mauserre, upon whom happiness had bestowed additional valour. She joined us, with eyes still heavy with sleep, and all wrapped in furs as if it were mid-winter. M. de Mauserre persuaded her to get into the barouche, the hood of which, being raised, would protect her against the coolness of the morning. He himself got into the brake, intending to drive, and called to him Lulu and her governess. He had not, however, calculated upon his mischievous son-in-law, who took particular pleasure in inviting himself to a seat there, under the pretext that he hoped to be benefited by the instructive conversation of Mademoiselle Holdenis. He would listen to no objections, and affected not to notice the frowns of his father-in-law, who

was at last obliged to submit to his troublesome company. I took a seat in the barouche with Madame de Mauserre and Madame d'Arci, and we drove off.

If you wish to know something about the Viennois country, madame, and have not time to visit it yourself, you may study Joanne's excellent guide; but it would be impossible for me to describe to you, with any kind of fidelity, the country that lies between Cremieux and Lake Paladru. Although, both from taste and profession, I am an admirer of fine landscapes, I had left my painter's eyes at Les Charmilles; I was nothing more than Tony Flamerin, with some great scheme in his head. The fear and anxiety with which M. d'Arci's war-plans had filled me caused me to make a rash promise, and I was cogitating in my mind how I should honourably discharge myself of the undertaking.

The secret means I had boasted of appeared to me, upon examination, rather questionable, and I hesitated to make use of them. In order to see clearly what course to pursue, it was necessary to have a clear idea of my own feelings. At times I fancied I hated, like a plague, the enemy I had undertaken to drive away, and I promised myself to treat her without mercy; a moment after, I would find myself doubting this hatred, into which perhaps more resentment and jealousy, than aversion, entered. You have read Tasso, and the episode of the bewitched forest which Tancredi had undertaken to free from the spell. He should have begun by liberating his heart; for you know what happened to him and to his sword when the tree he meant to split in two showed him Clorinda's face—the Clorinda he foolishly thought he loved no longer. I asked myself if I were quite cured of my Clorinda, and if at the decisive moment I should not feel the sword of inexorable justice tremble in my hand. My only resource was in relying upon some unexpected event, some incident or other, that would inspire me with a resolu-

tion ; but what sort of a skill is that which relies upon accidents ? M. d'Arcei would have laughed heartily at me if he had read my thoughts.

Thus was my mind engaged, and you will easily excuse me for visiting one of the most beautiful countries in the world without seeing it. I remember, however, long lines of hills shaded by oaks that served as a frame to fertile plains covered with rich harvests. We drove on for hours over a hilly plateau ; we could see others forming an amphitheatre around us, all crowned with pretty villages, high steeples, and massive châteaux. I remember, also, that we drove through pretty hamlets, whose whitewashed houses watched us driving past. I remember, further, that under their pent-houses hung hurdles to dry cheeses, and that there came from their windows a vague hum of spinning-wheels and weaving-ooms. I recollect that on coming through these hamlets we drove under big walnut-trees, whose lengthened shade slept peacefully on the dusty road ; on the right and left were haystacks ; then, as far as the eye could see, clover and corn and blossoming fields of buckwheat, through which ran dishevelled grape-vines with crimson leaves, which seemed to hold each other by the hand and dance like so many madcaps. That they had that air of jollity I can assure you, but what put them into so frolicsome a mood I could not tell.

Our horses having relaxed their pace to ascend a hill, my ideas became clearer, and I gazed a long time at a fresh valley that resembled one of those pictures of Poussin's, in which he amused himself by bringing together the most diversified scenes of country-life. In the background was seen a turf-pit where two men were opening a trench, while a third gathered the turf into piles ; a few steps farther, a bed of green peas and some women busy picking them ; others washing clothes in a brook hard by ; next, children cutting willow wands ; a meadow where a few cows and a

white horse were pasturing ; on the further side of the valley a ploughed field, rich and shiny, in which a plough drawn by four oxen was moving up and down. Men, women, children—all these people were talking and laughing ; the turf talked to the peas, the plough to the washerwomen ; the cows now and then put a word in while chewing their cud ; and the gravity of the animals seemed a satire on the gaiety of the men. Shed over this scene the transparent vapour and softness of an autumn sun, drinking in drop by drop the exhalations of the earth, and you have a picture—indeed, Poussin himself could not furnish a better.

I know something more interesting than the most beautiful of landscapes ; and that is, the spectacle of a happy soul—when this soul is neither that of a wicked person nor a fool. Madame de Mauserre furnished this spectacle. She was happiness personified ; it shone in her eyes, in her smile ; she was enveloped in it as in a fluid. One would have thought that she had only been living for two days ; the world seemed to her a charming novelty ; the most insignificant objects threw her into childlike delights and wonderments. Had she not just discovered that there is a sun ? Her look seemed to say, “By the way, do you know that in ten months I shall be his wife ?” This good soul would have liked to shed her joy on all around her—to spend her gladness in alms all along the way. She spied, in a field, a ragged child pasturing a flock of turkeys. She ordered the carriage to stop, ran to the child and kissed it, and talked with it, seated on a stone, the frightened turkeys the while cackling and spreading their feathers around her. When she went, she left two gold pieces in its hand. A little further on she emptied the rest of her purse into the hat of an old blind man. We looked at each other knowingly—Madame d’Arci and I—and the look meant a great many things.

From the valley that made me think of Poussin to the

village of Abrets, where we halted to breakfast, I was less absorbed, and I can assure you that that road perhaps has not its equal anywhere. It passes through the gladdest, the freshest of orchards, covered with such soft grass that I almost wished I were a sheep, that I might browse it. The two rows of trees between which we were driving arched their branches above, and formed arbours over our heads. We did not overtake the brake till we reached Abrets. They had driven like the wind, and did not stop to talk with turkey-herds; the driver, being out of sorts, was but too glad to have three horses to whip with all his might.

You would not believe how little like himself M. de Mauserre was under certain circumstances. There were two men in him, of which the one was as careful of his command over himself as the other was not. During my stay at Dresden he had the management of a very thorny affair, and I had seen him oppose to all its vexations the most impassible and uniform expression of face; but in private, and when the question turned upon himself alone, he was incapable of dissembling; his annoyance showed itself freely on his face, where every one could read it as from an open book.

He was as gloomy as a prison during the whole of breakfast. M. d'Arci affected not to know why, and exasperated him with his attentions. On leaving the table he paid him back, however. There was in the garden of the inn a shooting-gallery. M. de Mauserre, who was a first-rate shot, challenged his son-in-law, and hit the centre three times, one after the other. The pit clapped, and the pearl of governesses cried, "Do tell us, sir, once for all, what talent is it that you do not possess?" M. d'Arci sent his ball into one of the target-posts, and found fault with the pistol, which he declared detestable. His second shot was hardly better. He persisted, however, till he hit the white of the target, and was so long over it, that, on leaving the garden,

he found that his father-in-law had got ahead of him and had driven off with the brake, leaving him behind. He was therefore obliged to take a seat in the barouche with us.

"Serves you right!" said Madame de Mauserre, laughing; then, in a more serious tone: "M. de Mauserre complains that you indulge in the ugly habit of teasing Mademoiselle Holdenis. Your jests might, in the end, injure her in the mind of her pupil. We are so glad of the absolute empire she has over our wild little kid!" He began to sneer, but I pinched his arm, and he swallowed his reply.

On leaving Abrets the road ascends a pretty steep hill for a long distance. On reaching the summit we left the main road, and struck into a lane that takes the traveller, in twenty-five minutes, to the village of Paladru, a short distance only from the lake, at the foot of a church perched on a hillock. I can tell you, madame, all about Lake Paladru, for we made a rather closer acquaintance with it than I could have wished. If you were fond of statistics, I could tell you that it is situated fifteen hundred feet above the level of the sea; that it is about six miles long and two miles wide; that it is very deep; that its water has mineral properties, and acts very effectively in certain maladies; that it has a slightly soapy taste, which does not prevent it from being very rich in fish. I prefer telling you, however, that no one should visit Cremieux without going to see this pretty lake and its delightful surroundings. The country abounds in superb ash-trees; some of the mountains that encircle both its shores are highly cultivated, and others are woody and wild. The lake, according to the hour of the day and the caprices of the wind, assumes a variety of tints—from the finest opal to azure blue or leaden gray. In short, Nature has amused herself by gathering together on its shores the greatest variety of scenery: creeks, bays, promontories; here, clusters of trees bending over the water

and dipping in it their tresses ; there, a pebbly beach ; further on, little cliffs beaten by the waves. If you ever go there, stop on one of these cliffs a few paces from the village, and look to your left. Beyond the lake and its reeds you will see, on the foreground, a curtain of silver-leaved willows ; above the willows a height shaded with fine walnut-trees, through which peep a church-steeple and the towers of a castle ; and, if the weather is clear, through the opening the hills have left, Mont Blanc will rise before you in all the dazzling glory of its snows, showing at the same time its two sides, the one gradually sloping toward France, and the other upright, like a gigantic wall, whereon the eagles themselves must become dizzy.

The traveller's guide will give you, madame, an account of the beauties of Lake Paladru ; but it will not tell you that it is a place where one may meet with disagreeable experiences. The one I had there demonstrated clearly that the profession of preacher has its dangers, and that German women have sometimes strange fancies.

VII.

Two hours after our arrival, Madame de Mauserre, tired by the drive, satiated with the lake and Mont Blanc, had fallen asleep upon one of the sofas of the Hôtel des Bains, and Lulu was sleeping also on a cushion at her feet. While waiting for dinner, M. de Mauserre, who was as expert in chess as in pistol-shooting, and who wanted another opportunity of humiliating his son-in-law, proposed a game, and the latter accepted, in the hope of a chimerical revenge.

Meta soon went out and gave her thoughts an airing upon the beach, where a boat, coming from the other end of the

lake, had just landed. The boatmen who rowed it had fastened it to a post and rolled the sail around the mast. She took it into her head to get in. I saw her sit down near the prow and remain there motionless, bending over the water that, perhaps, served her as a mirror. The opportunity seemed propitious. In a few seconds I had joined her, slyly unfastened the boat, and, taking oars in hand, pushed off into the lake.

At first she appeared frightened at being alone with me on the frail shell, and besought me to take her back. I pretended not to hear her, and continued rowing. Gradually she became quieter, and resigned herself to her fate. She took a seat at the stern, near the rudder. When we had gone beyond the middle of the lake, I rested on my oars and let the boat drift. She watched me closely, questioning my face in silence.

Having found, the day before, on one of the shelves of the château library, an old edition of the "Provinciales," I had the curiosity to look into it. One passage impressed me particularly, and engraved itself on my memory. Leaning against the mast, I quoted, folding my arms: "Truly, Father, it is better to have to do with people that have no religion, than with those who are so profoundly religious that they take motives into account; for, indeed, the kind motive of him who wounds another does no good to the one that is wounded. He cannot see this secret motive, and feels only the blow. And I do not know whether one would not feel less provoked in being brutally killed by angry persons, than to feel one's self conscientiously murdered by devout ones." I added: "Ah, what a great man Pascal was! and what a dangerous science casuistry is!"

"To whom are you talking?" she asked, smiling; "to the sky, to the fishes, or to me?"

"To somebody," I replied, "who has accused me more

than once of being a trifler ; and I answer to that somebody, Let us forgive these triflers, for they undo the next day the harm they have done the day before. I fear far more those who injure others from conviction ! It is of them that Pascal has said, that one is never so fully nor contentedly a scoundrel as when one is such from conscientious motives."

She looked around her. "I do not see the Jesuit to whom your speech is addressed," replied she, gently. "You ought to know that I have been brought up to dislike these good Fathers as much as you."

I took the oars again. I had soon doubled a little cape, the foliage of which concealed from us the village and the hotel. Meta was no longer afraid. She said, in a very calm tone : "What will they tell Lulu when she wakes, and asks for her governess?—Is it an elopement?" she said again. "Ah, I forgot—to-day is the 1st of September, and we were to come to an understanding. But a lake is not a cemetery!" Then she turned away, and contemplated awhile Mont Blanc, which appeared indistinctly behind a cluster of chestnut-trees.

I again let go the oars, and leaning a second time against the mast, I made a cigarette and lighted it. "The Jesuits have a broad back," I replied. "It is possible that they may have invented the fine art of prevarication with full security of conscience ; but I have been told that casuistry is cultivated in more than one country where they are not at all in favour. There are minds found there that make use of their subtlety to find good reasons to justify the most unjustifiable acts. There are others who despise the good commonplace morality of honest people ; they put it through an alembic, and their double-distilled maxims authorise them to allow themselves little licenses which common martyrs would disdain. Others, again, use their religion, which is a sincere one, to sanctify their covetousness. Their most interested actions become hallowed. These children of God look upon

the whole earth as their special inheritance, and, convinced that heaven has committed to them the duty of obliging the wicked to make restitution, they appropriate to themselves, with tears in their eyes, all they can."

I threw my cigarette into the lake. "I have heard of a sinner," I continued, "who, to tell the truth, had sinned but once; life had been so indulgent to her that she had found happiness in her fault. A saint happened to pass, and, seeing this happy criminal, exclaimed: 'What a bad example! The divine law of this world is order, which this woman has transgressed. The interest of heaven and morality requires that I deprive her of her ill-gotten happiness. I will take her house, I will take her husband, I will take her child, I will take her past and her future, her memories and her hopes—I will take all from her, and God will say, "Well done, angel of light! there is one disorder less in the world."'"

The blood rose to her cheeks, and she said: "For some days past you have been speaking in riddles; tell me, once for all, what ill-feeling you harbour in your mind against me, and of what infamy you suspect me."

"There is yonder," I replied, "in a village inn, a woman peacefully asleep. May she never wake again! for, some day, she will be crazed with despair on discovering that Mademoiselle Meta Holdenis has conceived the bold and honourable project of marrying M. de Mauserre."

Her face assumed a hard and angry expression, which I had never seen on it before. But it was a stage-trick only; the scene soon changed. The almost ferocious look which her eyes fixed on me, like the sting of a bee, gradually grew soft; her closed lips relaxed; her frowning brow became again as smooth as glass; she lowered her head, and I thought I could see tears under the eyelids. I waited a moment for her to speak, but in vain.

Mountain lakes are capricious and fantastical. When we

embarked there was not a breath of air, nor a ripple on the smooth surface of the water, which was of a silvery blue. Soon the shadow the hill threw over it assumed an emerald colour; the green, encroaching upon the azure, invaded the whole lake, which was seized as with a chill, and a chopping sea arose. The boat had drifted far into the lake. More and more embarrassed by Meta's prolonged silence and my own, I decided upon returning. I headed the boat towards the village of Paladru, whither the breeze was driving us, and unfurled the sail, requesting Meta to take charge of the rudder, which she had but to keep straight. She answered with a nod, and took hold of the tiller with a determined hand. The sail filled, and the boat sped like a horse that feels the spurs; already the reeds and pebbles of the shore became distinct.

Meta raised her head; her half-opened mouth drank in the wind, and her bosom swelled. "I want to recite to you once more," murmured she "the 'King of Thule.' Listen!" And, with the same voice in which she had formerly recited those verses—which, thanks to her, I knew by heart—she said:

"A King there was in Thule
Kept faith unto the grave,
To whom his dying mistress
A golden goblet gave."

The wind increased from second to second; suddenly a strong blast shook the sail so violently that by turns it beat the mast and filled again, as if it would split. The lake had changed from green to gray; it was spotted with foam and ruffled like an angry thing.

Suddenly, at an awkward movement of Meta's, the boat dipped and shipped a quantity of water. "Be cautious!" said I; "the least carelessness will capsize us."

She had come to the concluding stanza:

“ He saw it fall and quiver,
And sink beneath the sea.
Then downward drooped his eyelids,
And never more drank he.”

She repeated the last four lines twice, then looked at me. Her face had a singular expression. She took off her hat and let the wind play with her hair, that fluttered about her temples ; her cheeks were burning, and from the depth of her eyes, fixed on me, there gleamed a mysterious passion.

“ Your gipsy,” she cried, “ was a liar ! Did she not prophesy that I should live a hundred years ? ” And, lowering her voice, she added : “ We were to decide to-day whether we should spend our lives together. Since you no longer think of it, I will at least die with you.” With these words she gave the rudder so violent a wrench, that in the next second our boat was upside down, and your servant had six feet of water over his head.

Madame, we do not always know in this world what is useful and what injurious. I should never have imagined that my intercourse with my friend Harris could be of the least use to me. However, when I recovered from my first surprise, and from the bottom of the water had come up to the surface, my first thought was to congratulate myself on having spent three months with him at Geneva, because, by bathing every day in the lake, he had made a skilful swimmer of me. I assure you that at that moment all my paintings of the past or future seemed a mere trifle compared with the faculty I possessed of keeping myself above water. As my ideas became clearer, my second thought was that there was close by me a woman drowning, and that I was determined to save her or perish with her. You may think what you please, madame ; but it was not from a movement of humanity or compassion ; I felt for the first time a sort of passionate fury. I had forgiven Meta everything in

favour of the charming and laudable intention she had had of drowning Tony Flamerin ; it seemed to me all at once that life was no longer possible without her. This sentiment will no doubt seem extravagant to you, and you will think that the water of Lake Paladru, of which I had swallowed a considerable draught, was, in addition to its other virtues, more heady than Rhine-wine. Alas ! madame, it is not necessary to be drunk to lose one's senses. There is some madness in all human passions. It is the heart of man that flies to the head.

I made a plunge but could not see Meta. Fear was getting the better of me, when I thought that her dress might have been caught in the rudder, and that she might be under the boat. It was so. I soon got her loose. She was completely unconscious ; but I had no serious alarms, because she had hardly been more than a minute under the water. A slight motion she made with her fingers reassured me entirely. Keeping her head up with my left hand, I worked so vigorously with my right arm and legs, that the great Harris himself might have been proud of me. After a few moments, which seemed ages, I had the infinite satisfaction of touching land.

My first care was to lay Meta on her side. She opened her eyes, but closed them again immediately. I took her up in my arms and carried her as fast as I could toward the inn, which was not far off. I was met half-way by two enraged boatmen, who, overwhelming me with insults, wanted their boat back. I pointed to it, assuring them that it was safe enough, although it did not look so. My well-filled purse, which I held out to them, softened them, and they offered to help me with my burden ; but I meant to carry it myself. Madame de Mauserre, who meanwhile had awakened, was just coming out of the hotel with Lulu in search of us. When they perceived us in this plight, they

both began to shriek and fill the air with lamentations. I had an easier time with the owners of the boat than with Lulu, who took me to task about her governess.

The worst was that her screams brought out M. de Mauserre. He had left his game, flown into the yard, and I really thought we should have had a serious quarrel. He was furious. I hastened to dispel his anxiety by assuring him that Meta was alive; but he was less troubled by apprehension for her life than tormented by jealousy on seeing her in my arms, which held her tight, her cheek close to mine, and her hair hanging over my temples. He came up to me with clenched fists, and cried, "You are a miserable fool!"

This explanation gave me an idea of the depth of his wound. "You forget yourself, sir," I replied coolly; and, pushing him away with my shoulder, I entered the inn and laid my burden down. My strength as well as my enthusiasm was spent, and I was glad to be relieved.

M. d'Arci had meanwhile joined us. He shrugged his shoulders when he saw Meta, who was as pale as death, and said to me, "What an actress!" Then grumbled between his teeth, "The idea was ingenious, but the courage failed you."

VIII.

THE prompt attentions of Madame de Mauserre, assisted by her daughter-in-law and the innkeeper's wife, soon brought the pearl of governesses back to life again. She was undressed, and put in a warm bed, where she was not long in recovering her senses. Her first word was for Lulu, who threw herself on her with transports of joy. During that

time I had exchanged my wet clothes for a peasant's attire, and went down into the kitchen to warm myself. I found M. de Mauserre standing before the mantelpiece. "You will please explain all this to me," said he.

"I beg pardon," I replied, somewhat sharply. "It is rather I who should ask explanations of you."

Our old friendship triumphed, however, over his jealousy and pride, and he continued, in his former pleasant way: "You are right; Lulu's cries had completely unmanned me. Excuse me, I pray, and let us forget it."

I shook hands with him, without satisfying, however, his curiosity with regard to the details of our shipwreck. All that he got out of me was that Mademoiselle Holdenis imprudently chose the moment when the wind blew the hardest to let go the rudder. "Which proves once more," I added, "that women are bad pilots, and that we should not allow ourselves to be governed by them either on land or water."

Provoked by my reserve, he took me into the embrasure of a window, and, looking steadfastly into my eyes, said, abruptly: "Have you any serious intentions with regard to Mademoiselle Holdenis?"

"What does it matter to you?" I replied.

"I am interested in both of you, and I do not think that you suit each other."

"Whom, then, does she suit?" I asked, looking, in my turn, steadfastly at him.

"My daughter, to whom she is a necessity. Be frank with me. Is your heart very much engaged in the matter?"

"Perhaps," I said; "but she alone has a right to question me on that subject."

In the mean time the dinner was announced. I felt a real Burgundian appetite, and I had truly earned it. I did full justice to the repast, especially to a delicate grayling that

had been caught that same morning very near the place where we were capsized. This product of Lake Paladru was delicious. You see how little malice I bear! M. de Mauserre ate but little, and did not say three words. Madame de Mauserre never wearied of questioning me about my nautical adventure, and thanking me over and over again for having saved the life of so dear a person. M. d'Arci crammed down morsel after morsel to prevent himself from talking; and Madame d'Arci looked on with a quiet smile, and whispered to me, "Brave knight, what does it all mean?"

During dessert, Madame de Mauserre left us to look after Meta. She soon came back to tell us that the heroine of the day was getting on finely, and that, having taken some broth, she insisted on getting up. As her clothes were not yet dry, they were trying to find her some others. Lulu, who could not do without her governess, asked to go to her; and, on being refused, began to cry, and stamp with her feet, as in former days. To quiet her, M. d'Arci made her some paper dolls; every one joined in the sport, and the table was soon covered with them. After having furnished my quota, I went out into the garden to smoke a cigar.

The moon, in its second quarter, shed a silver flood over half the lake; the other half lay in deep shadow. It was no longer angry, but it seemed to have retained a sort of vague emotion; its waves stammered at intervals unintelligible words, as a child overtaken by sleep in its anger will still murmur in its dreams. I thought I would look after Meta. After what had happened, I fancied we ought to have a few words together.

I returned to the house through a back-door, went softly up-stairs, crept along the passage to her door, and was about to knock, when I perceived that she was not alone. I heard her say, "Tell me about my deliverer."

"He is in the best of humours," replied a gruff voice, which I recognised to be that of M. de Mauserre.

My first impulse was to push the door quickly open, my second to hold my breath and listen; but good consciences produce scruples, as good lands bear good wheat. To escape this temptation, I turned back, and went stealthily into the room where I had changed my clothes, and where my own were drying by a fire.

I was busy turning them over when I became aware that the two voices had resumed their talk. Remember, madame, when you visit Lake Paladru, that at the Hôtel des Bains the beds are soft, the meals liberal and well served, the graylings delicious, but that its ceilings and walls are as thin as paste-board; that from one room to another you can hear everything; and that, if you would not be overheard, you must murmur your secrets in the language of the ants. "*Non bis in idem*," say jurists, which means that one is not obliged to be conscientious twice in the same affair. So I listened this time, and heard the following conversation.

"Are not you going to tell me, then, which of you two first proposed this boating-expedition?" asked M. de Mauserre, in a dry, almost imperious tone.

"I really cannot tell; it seemed to me as if the boat got loose of its own accord."

"And you think this adventurous *tête-à-tête*, with a man whom I love and esteem, but who is no judge whatever in matters of propriety, quite natural, perhaps?"

"I was wrong, I know," replied she, humbly. "I forgot my place, and your daughter's governess begs you, sir, to accept her excuses."

"I am not just now my daughter's father; I am a man who thought he had a right—" He did not finish the sentence, but preferred to begin another. "Is not this the 1st

of September? It is to-day that Tony was to ask your hand. What answer did you give him?"

"I had no answer to give, sir, because he asked me nothing."

"A boat is a good place, though, to make love; one runs no risk of being disturbed. Were his declarations very ardent? Did he make a clever use of the opportunity? Was he bold enough?"

"Sir, are you aware to whom you are speaking?"

"I am inclined to think," continued he, "that your shipwreck was anything but an accident. M. Flamerin only wished to procure himself the pleasure of saving you, and the still greater pleasure of carrying you for ten minutes in his arms. How closely he held you to his heart! Are you sure that you were quite senseless?"

It was her turn now to speak loud, and she raised her voice. "Well, yes, then, since you wish it. M. Flamerin has taken great liberties with me to-day. What consoles me is that some day I shall perhaps be his wife."

"That shall never be!"

"If he is willing, who can prevent it? You forget that he, at least, is free!"

This remark crushed him, and I thought I heard him utter a deep sigh. It may be that I only imagined it; I have, at times, a singing in my ears. "If you have no regard for my advice," he continued, more gently, "I trust that you attach some importance to the consent of your family. I can assure you that your father will never sanction this marriage."

"Then you have written to him? How you abuse my confidence!"

"He answered me by return of post that M. Flamerin may perhaps be a good match, but that he would never accept for a son-in-law any but a serious man with severe

principles, and that men of principle do not generally belong to the class of artists. Such a delicacy of sentiment is the more honourable in him, since he finds himself, it seems, in an embarrassing situation."

"He mentioned the state of his affairs?" she asked with some emotion.

"I thank him for his confidence. Some one, it seems, has offered him a partnership in an enterprise which would, before long, help him to recover his lost fortune; but they ask him to deposit a capital which he does not possess."

"And which he asks you to advance him?"

"I should be happy to do something to oblige Mademoiselle Holdenis's father."

"Ah, sir, why do you oblige a daughter to plead against her parent, and to tell you that, however honest and loyal he may be, he is a man of projects and chimeras—that he is unfortunate in all that he undertakes—that you would render him a fatal service by indulging him in his illusions—that you would never see your money again—and that my pride would ever suffer from it? I ask of you, sir, to refuse this request. I am ready to ask it of you on my knees."

"Calm yourself. I will refuse, if you say so. Let me tell you that you have the noblest and most delicate sentiments I know of."

"And you, sir, are kindness itself; and yet, just now you raised a most unjust quarrel."

I fancied I heard him move nearer to her. "Once more, and for the last time: Do you love him, or not?"

"Let us drop this subject, sir. I do not like to dispute with you."

"You refuse, then, to calm my anxiety?" asked he, in an almost supplicating tone.

"I can hardly believe in your anxiety. I should rather believe in your despotism, if you were not so kind."

“And my despotism appears insupportable to you?”

“I am quite ready to be governed by you; but we live,” she added, with a touch of merriment, “in a time when the most submissive of peoples ask their government for explanations.”

“You ask for explanations?—you will oblige me to tell you what I had promised myself never to reveal? Yes, I am despotic, and my secret— Oh, do not force me to speak, for you have already guessed it!”

There was a long pause—at least it appeared so to me. M. de Mauserre broke it at last, saying: “I do not know what you will think of me. Does my avowal seem odious or ridiculous to you?”

“I do not judge, sir,” replied she; “I think I must be dreaming. You are mistaken; it must be an illusion. It is impossible that I, a poor girl, without either mind or personal advantages, could have made myself beloved by a man like you? It will be the everlasting glory of my life; but I prefer the peace I have now lost, to this dangerous honour. I was so happy in your society!—and now, alas! I must bid farewell to-morrow to Les Charmilles. What have you done, sir? How cruel you are!”

“You mean to leave me!” cried he, vehemently. “I will not suffer it!”

“But suppose I should be weak enough to stay, what life shall I lead in a house where I loved to find you, and where, henceforth, prudence and duty both require that I should avoid you? Adieu, now, to that sweet liberty that had so many charms for you and for me!”

“You shall stay, I say; and there will be no need of avoiding me. I promise you that you shall never again hear from me another word to wound or frighten you. This has been an unfortunate day; let us wipe it from our memory. Let to-morrow be as yesterday; let us both forget that we came together to a cursed place where jealousy made me rave—”

"How can you ask it of me, sir? It may be easy for you to forget, but I cannot. I must distrust my memory."

"I beg of you," said he again, "treat me as a patient whose unreasonableness must be borne with for fear of worse consequences. Consider it an absurd caprice. Be sure that I am the first to condemn my folly; but it frightens me, and, if you refuse me, I cannot answer for what may follow; I shall commit some great error, perhaps, that would ruin us all. Promise me that you will not dispose of your hand without consulting me, and that you will not leave *Les Charmilles* without my consent."

"You terrify me!" said she, almost distracted.

"I shall not leave this room till you have made me such a promise."

"So be it, sir; but I make it in the hope that you will soon relieve me from it."

This conversation, madame, irritated me dreadfully; it was getting unbearable, and I was thinking of putting an end to it, when I heard a door open. A moment after, I heard Madame de Mauserre's voice saying: "I am glad to see, my dear, that you have good company. She has got quite over it—hasn't she, Alphonse?"

"Thanks to your kind care, madame, for which I shall be eternally grateful!" replied Meta. "I congratulate myself on having seen death so closely, since it has given me the opportunity of assuring myself of your friendship."

"Did you doubt it? Indeed, you have scared us all dreadfully!" And Madame de Mauserre took a new start, and went again over the details of her emotions, for she was fond of repeating things.

I crept away discreetly, and returned into the garden, where for a long time I thought over what I had heard. I did not exactly know what to think of it. There were within me an attorney-general who investigated the matter

and a very crafty lawyer that had an answer for everything. The court was in doubt, and demanded an adjournment for inquiry. While consulting with myself, I looked at the stars, but they could give me no clue.

The sound of the piano roused me from my reflections. Meta, wrapped in Madame de Mauserre's cloak, had come down into the parlour, and was playing one of Chopin's nocturnes. The maestro must have been thinking of me when he composed it. His music depicted unmistakably the sentiments of a man who is about to drown himself with the woman he loves; it said, also, "If you will not live with me, I will die with you!" The piano was a wretched village spinet, to which Meta had given eloquence. The proverb is right: There is no bad tool for a workman possessed by the devil. She again looked as if she had the devil in her eyes. I had gone to lean on the window-ledge, and watched her without her seeing me. The habitual softness of her look had been replaced by a murderous vivacity; but there are sometimes good demons, and, with the help of music, I succeeded in persuading myself that the one lodged in those blue eyes promised me happiness. At times it seemed almost evident, but, when she ceased to play and closed the piano, my doubts all came back again.

I slept very badly that night: first, because I was turning over in my mind a problem of transcendental mathematics; and, secondly, because my neighbour on the right, M. de Mauserre, was on his feet till morning, pacing his room like a caged bear. His sleeplessness consoled mine.

At Lulu's request, it was decided that we should breakfast at Paladru, and not start for home till the afternoon. Towards eleven o'clock I went down-stairs into the dining-room. Madame d'Arci was seated near a window, watching Madame de Mauserre, who was walking in the garden with Meta. She pointed first at the one and then at the other, saying: "How

can he desire this one, when he has the good fortune to possess the other !”

“You must look upon it differently,” I replied. “This woman here can only be appreciated in society, at a fête, in a ballroom ; but, as there are no balls given at Les Charmilles, you must confess that in the country, and on a rainy day, the other one offers greater resources.”

“Add to this,” she replied, “that this one is as sincere, as true, as sure of herself, as the other is mysterious, snaky, and sly, and that it is a recognised fact that men more particularly fancy dangerous women.”

“There are many people,” I said, “who prefer travelling in countries where there are precipices.”

At this moment Madame de Mauserre perceived us, and cried : “You look like conspirators. May we know what you are plotting ?”

“We plot,” I said, “to bring you back here in ten months, and to give you on Lake Paladru a Venetian fête, the programme of which shall be my care.”

She thanked me with a motion of her head, and continued her walk.

After having taken care to close the windows, Madame d’Arci subjected me to questions which I did not feel inclined to comply with. I gave her but evasive answers. I recalled to her mind that she and M. d’Arci had granted me a vote of confidence and a credit of time.

“You will have to show your account-book in the end,” remarked M. d’Arci, who in the meantime had joined us. “Your intentions are good enough ; I only reproach you for your want of consistency, and for being so good a swimmer.”

“I do not wish the death of the criminal ; I am working for her conversion.”

“All very well for you to preach to people,” he said ;

"but, if they fall in the water, I don't see any use in jumping after them."

"Let me do as I please, and remember your promise."

"I will do nothing to irritate my father-in-law, and nothing to make Madame de Mauserre uneasy. Does that satisfy you?"

"I shall be quite satisfied if we succeed in averting a crisis which would surely be to the advantage of the enemy."

"Let your mind be easy," said Madame d'Arci. "We have thought over your recommendations, and we are convinced, like you, that so long as Madame de Mauserre suspects nothing she is invulnerable: her confidence is her safety."

I made her a sign to be silent; I had that moment heard in the next room, the door of which was ajar, a slight mouse-tread, and, looking out of the window, I saw that Meta was no longer in the garden. "Heaven grant that she may not have heard us!" said I to Madame d'Arci. "Believe my experience, the walls of this inn are perfidious."

Two hours later we were on our way home. Whether as a precaution against his son-in-law or against himself, M. de Mauserre had begged his wife to ride in the brake with him. I took my seat in the barouche with my two allies. In going to Paladru I was lost in thoughts; in returning home I was lost in dreams. Whatever efforts I made to see the landscape, I had constantly before my eyes an angry lake tossing a little boat about, and two large eyes half demented, that stared at me, and seemed to cry, "Love or life!" This is the reason, madame, why I travelled twice through a very fine country without seeing it.

IX.

SEVERAL days passed, during which I was unable to exchange two words with Meta. Her bath had done her no harm ; but Lulu had taken cold in coming home, and her governess kept her in her room, where she remained faithfully with her. I was impatiently waiting for her to put an end to this voluntary seclusion, when the crisis I apprehended took place. I must say in justice to M. d'Arci, however, that he had done nothing to bring it about ; it was the enemy himself that provoked it. Really, one could not sufficiently distrust the walls of the Hôtel des Bains.

One evening, a little before dinner, as Madame de Mau-serre was sitting alone in her boudoir and thinking of anything but a catastrophe, Mademoiselle Holdenis walked up to her, pale and with a haggard countenance, and threw herself weeping at her feet. She fancied, at first, that Lulu was dead or dying. Meta, however, found strength enough to reassure her on that point.

"But what is it, then, my dear? You frighten me! Have you received any sad news?"

Meta shook her head.

"Did anybody trouble you? Did M. d'Arci again—Tell me, what is it? It must be a very hard case if I do not succeed in comforting you."

"You overwhelm me with kindness!" replied Meta, still weeping. "Treat me as an enemy—turn me out of this house! I must not stay a day longer, for your sake as well as for mine." She could say no more ; her sobs stifled her voice.

Madame de Mauserre entreated, questioned, but could only obtain short and obscure answers; but, when a person has been for some time in the dark, she begins at last to see; and Madame de Mauserre began gradually to detect the cruel truth. "Good God!" exclaimed she. "M. de Mauserre loves you, and he has dared to tell you so! Where?—how?—when? What has happened? Tell me all."

"I have already said too much!" stammered Meta.

In saying this she dropped her head upon Madame de Mauserre's lap, who repulsed her violently with both arms; but she soon repented of her anger. "How unjust I am," said she, "to be angry with the courageous friend who opens herself to me and warns me!"

"Ah, madame," replied Meta, "do not praise my courage; rather pity my weakness. M. de Mauserre has wrung from me the promise that I would not leave Les Charmilles without his consent. He commanded, and I, for fear of his displeasure, promised. Tell him, I beseech you, that I came to you to denounce him. In his anger he will relieve me of this promise."

"No, surely not," replied Madame de Mauserre. "I shall not betray your noble confidence. I shall speak in my name only—shall beseech him."

"Do not beseech him," interrupted she. "Command—exact! Be sure that he can have no very serious feeling for me. It is but a day's caprice, for which your reproaches will make him blush, and which he will hasten to sacrifice to you. Who am I, to win his heart away from you?—you who are so good, so beautiful? You have not yet lost all empire over him; at the first word you utter he will repent. Tell him that you suspect something wrong—that my presence here troubles your peace—that, unless he dismisses me, you are resolved to do it. Or, if you have not courage enough to say all this, find a pretext—accuse me of neglect—

ing my duties—of being remiss in the care I owe your dear child. Whatever you may say, I shall not contradict you, and I shall leave your house heart-broken, it is true, but full of gratitude for the dear hand that dismisses me.”

Madame de Mauserre stood for a few moments speechless, distracted, dreaming, as one would dream on the edge of a precipice. “No,” replied she at last, “I shall not take the trouble to invent anything; I could not slander a person that has only wronged me against her will. I cannot lie; do not ask it of me. If I speak, I shall tell the truth; and I tell it you at this moment, when I confess that I admire you, I love you and I hate you all at once.”

She burst into tears in her turn. As Meta was endeavouring to console her, she told her to be silent, and, making an effort to kiss her, dismissed her.

We were usually seven at table; on that day we were only two. M. and Madame d’Arci had accepted an invitation to dine with some neighbours; Madame de Mauserre gave out that she had a violent headache, which kept her in her room, and Meta an engagement to take dinner with her young patient in the nursery. M. de Mauserre courteously made up his mind to a *tête-à-tête* with me, and made the best of it. Despite both our efforts, however, the conversation was embarrassing, and dragged; we had so many things to avoid speaking of! After the coffee he left me to take a ride, which was his habit when he had anything on his mind.

I had just returned to my room when Madame de Mauserre sent for me. I obeyed the summons immediately, and I had but to look at her to assure myself that she was suffering from something more than a sick-headache. Her face was dejected, her lips tremulous, her eyes dead. She held out her hand to me, and tried to smile. This half-smile, which I shall never forget, seemed to me the image

of her ruined happiness. "The punishment I feared has come at last," she cried ; "but it is far more terrible than any I could have imagined."

And, after having made me promise secrecy, she related her conversation with Meta. I said all I could to calm and encourage her, but in vain. I had judged her but too well. This poor soul, so open to every impression, going to extremes in her griefs and joys, was incapable of putting a cheerful face on her trouble. The first blow had knocked her down ; she could not get up again.

"Must I tell you how it is with me?" said she, interrupting me. "Just now, when Mademoiselle Holdenis came in, there was such a fatality in her look that I felt at once a great affliction was at hand. My first thought was that Lulu was dead. God forgive me ! but if it had been so, I think I should be less unhappy. My love is dearer to me than my child."

I thought it best to let her talk on. Grief tires itself out in talking, and such fatigue is a relief.

"No, Tony, it is no dream," she said again. "There were but ten more months to wait to become his wife ; and God condemns me to be wrecked in sight of the haven. Oh, if you knew all he was to me ! I have come to love him a thousand times more than the day when he carried me off—for, Tony, it was he, surely, that carried me off, was it not ? He certainly knew what he was about. I resisted him a long time ; but he tormented me so that I yielded at last—indeed, more from weakness and pity than from love. You were there ; you must know all about it. Yes, at that time he loved me more than I loved him. How different it is now ! I have made an idol of him, and it is for this that God punishes me now ; he detests all idolatry."

A few moments after she reproached that jealous God for his injustice, his cruelty. Could he not find in all the world

a woman more guilty than she to strike? Should he not reserve his great visitations, his great blows, for proud and insolent faults? Why should his glory be interested in crushing a reed?

Then, again, she would all at once exclaim that Meta must be mistaken—that there was too much improbability in her story. “How could she please him, Tony? She is certainly not handsomer than I! Do you not remember that the day when she came to Les Charmilles M. de Mauserre thought her ugly? We even disputed on the subject. Her face rather pleased me. It is an agreeable face, because it has a good and intelligent look; but that is all. Now, really, Tony, do you think she is anything extraordinary? Is there in her something that escapes me? Oh, you men! you have such strange eyes: you make them see whatever you please! They are false witnesses, that impudently lie to justify your infidelities.”

And soon again, changing both tone and language: “Alas! it is but too plain! I ought to have foreseen that this Meta would cause him to make dangerous comparisons and reflections. She possesses all the talents that I lack: she is active, constantly occupied, and I cannot stand ten minutes on my feet without dropping with fatigue. She understands how to bring up a child, how to rule a house; I have never been able to manage anything but a fan—if it is not the fan that manages me. M. de Mauserre can talk with her about all that interests him; she is so intelligent, and I am but a bridled goose. She understands him; she can amuse him, advise him. Yes, truly, a serious wife was needed by this serious man. She has the virtues of the ant, and I am the grasshopper—not even that: the cicada sings, and I don’t sing. It so happens that here the ant is the musician, and you know how fond he is of music. But then, again, let us be fair: she flatters him—confess, Tony, that she flatters

him! I? I adore him, but I have never flattered him; and, although he is a god to me, I do not constantly repeat to him that he is a great man. I have always thought that there is in flattery a secret contempt for what one loves. I love him, and that is the only science I know, and it is the cause of my ruin. Men never tire of being admired, caressed, flattered; too constant a love wearies them. I am sure that he has been tired of me a good while. I have no doubt he said to himself, 'She is always the same;' and, wondering that he should ever have loved me, he conceals from me, out of pity, the mortal satiety his happiness gave him. I did not see it—indeed, if I had not been told, I should never have guessed it. Tony, love is silly; but what is the use of robbing me of my dream—why open my eyes? What was the use? When one has seen the truth thus face to face, one has but one more thought left, and that is, to hide in a desert island or in the other world!"

Thus did she talk on without stopping, mingling her complaints, contradicting herself, but coming invariably back to the same conclusion—"Ah, Tony, how unhappy I am!"—after which she would again begin to cry.

As she obstinately refused to listen to my consolations, I got angry, and called her a foolish, stubborn woman! I told her, somewhat harshly, that matters were not nearly so desperate as she thought—that the only serious danger was the exaggeration and the extravagance of her grief.

"We shall soon know that," replied she, knitting her brows.

"How? What do you mean to do?"

"I mean to have, this very evening, a talk with M. de Mauserre."

I was on the point of giving her a severe scolding, she seemed so to make it a point to realise my darkest forebodings. "Oh, you unreasonable woman!" I cried; "do you wish to stake all and lose all?"

"I am determined," she replied, "clearly to understand my situation—to know exactly what I have to expect." And, with a show of logic very surprising in her, she added: "Either it is, as you say, but a caprice of little consequence, and then M. de Mauserre will not hesitate to make the sacrifice I shall ask of him; or, as I fear, the affair is more serious, and, in that case, what is the use of waiting? What should I gain by it? I want to know my fate as soon as possible."

"And do you not know," I replied, "that it needs but just such a tempestuous opposition as the one you intend making to strengthen a man in a caprice, and drive him to extremities he would never have dared to think of without a shudder? People get embittered—become obstinate—in discussion; pride steps in, and they end by wishing for what they would never have even dared to desire. If, now, you only had the least talent in manœuvring a little—the least bit of diplomacy! But you are the most awkward woman I have ever known."

She answered me that I understood her perfectly; that she did not in the least pique herself on possessing any skill of that kind; that she was at the same time too awkward and too proud to resort to small manœuvres; that she meant to lose her suit, or gain it honestly. "Besides," continued she, "Mademoiselle Holdenis, who has behaved in this affair as an honest girl and true friend, advised me to have, as soon as possible, an explanation on the subject with M. de Mauserre."

"I have no doubt," I replied, "that Mademoiselle Holdenis has the best intentions; but I doubt whether she loves you as much as I do. Believe me, follow my advice before you follow hers."

"And what do you advise?"

"To be patient, to temporise, to dissemble, and to let your friends act."

"Oh, Tony," replied she, with a sad smile, "you ask an impossible thing! A good physician consults his patient's temperament, and orders only remedies that he can bear. I have never been able to restrain myself, or to dissemble. You must take me for what I am; I cannot help it. Even if I should abandon the idea of an explanation with M. de Mauserre, my eyes would betray me, and would reveal all my uneasiness, all my jealousy. Abandon me to my miserable fate, and let the stone roll into the abyss, where its weight carries it; even if you succeeded in holding it back to-day, it would escape your hand before two more days had passed."

I did not give the matter up, however. I made her the strongest, the most eloquent representations. I begged her, scolded her, almost insulted her, and I was getting very excited, when suddenly the door opened, and M. de Mauserre entered.

The prince of darkness in person could not have produced upon me a more disagreeable effect. He looked surprised at seeing his wife in *tête-à-tête* with me, and still more surprised at our agitation and confusion, which we did not succeed in hiding from him. "I am very glad, my dear," said he, laying his hat on the table, "to see that your headache does not condemn you to solitude."

I do not know what she was going to answer, but I stopped her with a gesture; and I was wrong in doing so, for M. de Mauserre was just stepping up to the mantelpiece, over which there was a mirror. He did not, however, seem to have noticed anything in it, and, bringing up an arm-chair, he sat down, and said, in the quietest tone: "You do not look well, Lucy! Tony has taken his degree in medicine. He cured me once of an attack of rheumatism, which his learned diagnosis took for an attack of gout. His remedies, it seems, serve in all cases, for he certainly did cure me. Has he felt your pulse?"

"Madame de Mauserre is a little feverish," I replied, "and I think that she needs rest above all; a good night's sleep will make her all right again." And, rising, I looked at him with an air that meant, "I am going, my dear sir; you had better do the same."

"I am not sleepy; I shall not go to bed so soon," cried Madame de Mauserre; and, in her turn, she made a beseeching gesture, which I interpreted, "For heaven's sake, do not go!"

"Our Paladru excursion has proved anything but a success," remarked M. de Mauserre. "Lulu caught a bad cold by it. Did your headache allow you to go to see her this evening?"

A thrill ran through her whole frame. "I should certainly have gone to see her," she replied, "if she had been alone; but she is not alone, and the person who attends on her—"

I hastened to cut short the rest of her speech. "In fact," said I, playfully, "Mademoiselle Holdenis not only loves her patients, but she is so jealous that she will allow no one to come near them."

There was a pause for two minutes, interrupted only by the ticking of the clock, which, I fancied, had a fever also; its jerky pulse seemed to beat by turns once or twice in a second.

"The night is superb!" remarked again M. de Mauserre. "The moon will be full to-morrow; it is already as round as a cheese."

"I have noticed one thing," replied Madame de Mauserre: "you ride out whenever you seem preoccupied, or wish to hold counsel with yourself. Does anything trouble you this evening?"

"Why, my dear? What trouble could I have?"

"What were you thinking about just now, on the way?"

"I was thinking of your headache, which obliged Tony to

dine alone with me ; the rest of the time I was thinking of nothing."

"Alphonse, a man of your disposition is always thinking of something or somebody." He looked at her with surprise.

"Oh, dear madame," cried I, "men of sense are more stupid than you think, and I consider the best of them quite capable of staring for an hour at the moon without thinking of anything whatsoever!" Then, going to the window, "It is certain," I said, "that it is a very beautiful night. Do you feel inclined to come upon the terrace with me and smoke a cigar, sir?"

He assented, and was approaching Madame de Mauserre to wish her "good-night," when she said to him: "One moment, Alphonse; I want to speak with you."

In spite of all the trouble I had taken, I had not succeeded in forestalling the perilous explanation of which I so much feared the issue. Who ever struggled successfully against female obstinacy? I hastened towards the door, and had my hand already on the knob, when Madame de Mauserre called me back, saying, "Stay, Tony; since M. de Mauserre and I have known you, we have never had any secrets from you."

"Stay, my dear sir," said he, sarcastically, "stay! and do not look so discomfited, otherwise I shall think that you are already acquainted with what Madame de Mauserre has to say."

I had no choice left but to go back to my chair, where I sat down with drooping arms, and eyes fixed on the ceiling, addressing to the cornice a mental oration, in which I besought it to come down on our heads.

"Well, Lucy, what is it you have to say?" asked M. de Mauserre, who was, no doubt, more uneasy than he cared to let us see. "What is the subject of this conversation which you preface so solemnly? Is it a regular suit? Shall we write out a protocol? Do you want Tony to act as clerk?"

"I have a petition to present to you," murmured she.

"A petition? What a singular term! During the six years in which I have had the pleasure of living with you, you have never had a petition to present to me."

"That encourages me to hope that you will not reject the only request I have ever made of you. I beseech you to make me a sacrifice which will probably cost you much."

This ingenious way of seizing the bull by the horns filled me with rage, and inwardly I sent all women to the deuce. I was not thinking of you just then, madame!

"What's the matter with you?" asked M. de Mauserre. Then he looked again straight before him, and waited.

"Will you do me the favour," continued she, after a moment's hesitation, "to send Mademoiselle Holdenis away from here?"

He started in his chair. "Do I understand you?" cried he. "What—the person whom you admire, whom you praise, whom you exalt to the skies, whom you call the pearl of governesses! This is a blast of wind most unexpected, indeed! What on earth has Mademoiselle Holdenis done, I should like to know, all at once to forfeit your favour? What do you reproach her with?"

"Nothing for which she is herself responsible. You would oblige me a great deal if you would excuse me from explaining my motives. Can you not guess them?"

"Well, let us see; perhaps, in seeking awhile, we may find some reason or other. Are you dissatisfied with her that, by dint of good sense and patient firmness, she has disciplined a child whom neither you nor I could bring up, and who, left to our care, would have become insupportable. Does it displease you that she has established a spirit of order and government, and acquired some authority over your domestics? Or do you begrudge me the kind and devoted care she bestowed on me during my illness, or the

pleasure I sometimes take in her conversation? Speak—explain your reasons!”

“I accuse her of having, despite herself, won your love,” replied she, in a tremulous voice.

He was startled, and, in order to conceal the blush that rose to his cheeks, he pushed his chair back and put himself into the shadow cast by the shade of the lamp. “What do you mean,” cried he, “by this sudden freak?—and who is the good friend who has rendered you so eminent a service? Do you know him, Tony?”

“No,” I replied, drily. “I think, as you do, that there are cases when the first duty of friendship is to be silent; and silence has been to me the more easy to keep since I have not noticed anything which it would be worth while to repeat.”

“Tony has fought against my suspicions,” continued she, “but he has not succeeded in quieting me. Alphonse, I do not reproach you with a crime. Confess only that Mademoiselle Holdenis has inspired you with a certain liking—a certain attachment, which I have a right to consider excessive. She has made me acquainted with the ugly evil that is called jealousy. Yes, for the first time in my life I am jealous; and you love me too much—do you not?—to suffer that I should be so for long!”

“Say, rather, that I have too just an opinion of your good sense and judgment to suppose that you could long suffer from an imaginary evil, or persist in a caprice which I cannot possibly believe to be a serious one.”

“Alphonse,” said she, raising her voice, “do you promise me that Mademoiselle Holdenis shall leave?”

“Yes, as soon as you shall have found a teacher equal to her, with a heart and mind like hers—so apt in forming and educating your daughter—in teaching her so many things for which I have not the time nor you the inclination or leisure.”

At these words she broke out : " Very well. Either Made-moiselle Holdenis or I must leave Les Charmilles ! "

" That is too much ! " cried he, stamping his feet. " If I listened to you any longer I should forget myself, and I distrust my anger. I appeal from your unreasonableness of to-day to the good sense you had yesterday, and which, I trust, you will again have to-morrow. Good night, my dear ; I leave you with your confidant. May he give you better, and, above all, more disinterested advice than heretofore ! " And, giving me anything but a tender look, he hurriedly left the room, slamming the door after him.

Madame de Mauserre soon after rose also, and walked feverishly up and down the room. The floor echoed her wrath. On passing before the fire, she threw her fan into it. I had never seen her thus. Her wounded pride inflamed her cheeks. She seemed all bristles, or ruffled as an eagle whose nest is interfered with. I thought I could hear the beating of her heart. She walked towards a glass door that opened upon a balcony, at the foot of which was a grass-plot ornamented with a statue of Flora and encircled by a railing curiously worked, representing blackberry-bushes and cactuses ingeniously intertwined, and forming a perfect iron hedge. She looked for a moment at the statue and the railing. I became uneasy, and followed her ; but she soon recovered her natural tenor of mind. Her momentary insanity had terrified her. She stepped back into the middle of the room, where she burst into tears, and cried as if her heart would break.

" Tony," cried she, " you have seen him—you have heard him ! Do you still persist in saying that I am mistaken, and that his heart is still mine ? "

" I have seen, and I have heard," I replied, " and I declare to you that your greatest enemy is yourself. A rival who had sworn your destruction would not have done you so

much harm as you are doing yourself. Bless me, but you deserve to be left to your sad fate ! Yet I will save you despite yourself." She laid both hands on my shoulder, and looked into my eyes, as if to read her future in them.

"I only ask three days," continued I, disengaging myself; "and you shall promise me now that, during these three days, you will not make a motion nor say a word ; for all that you would do or say would turn against you."

"Three days ! Does it take any longer for grief to kill a woman like me !" Then, in the tone of a child that has been scolded and asks pardon : "I promise you to be calm," said she. "I will—indeed, I will be calm," and, as if to give me forthwith a specimen of that calm, she cried, as I left her : "If you fail, Tony, I shall go from here : I shall—but not by the stairway, that I assure you !"

X.

It is a hard thing, madame, to make a good picture ; however, when one tries, one may sometimes succeed. It is no less difficult to save a woman from drowning ; but many a good swimmer has done it. One learns to swim as one learns to paint ; but there is an art that can neither be learned nor taught, because it has no fixed rules, and that is the art of living. Perhaps you have superior knowledge on this subject ; but my own little experience has convinced me that any claim to calculate and to govern the conjunctures of this lower world is a pretension as vain as that of the astrologers, and that the prognostications of sages are no better than gipsy-prophecies. Sometimes we succeed despite common sense and everything else, and sometimes we fail in the face of all that promised success. One man is saved by what was to ruin him, and another is ruined by what was expected to

save him. Do not let us ask philosophy to teach us to govern our destiny or that of others ; it can only serve to rob us of interest in our own little affairs ; and, to accomplish this even, old age has to come to its aid ! This is our lot, madame ; but it does not prevent me from firmly believing that you and I shall both reach a good old age—see our hundredth birthday—and that to the end we shall be very wise and very happy.

I conclude my remarks, and again take up the thread of my story. Madame de Mauserre had promised me to make an effort to conquer her grief and to give up her headache and seclusion the very next day. This effort, however, appeared too great ; she persisted, despite my advice, in pretending sickness and keeping her room. She could not muster courage, she said, to meet certain eyes that would read her condemnation.

Madame d'Arci, having gone to see her, soon learned, after a few questions, what had happened. She met me half an hour later, and said : " Well, what you so much feared has come to pass."

" Yes," I said ; " but, fortunately, we have nothing to reproach ourselves with."

" And what are we going to do now ?"

" There is a leak in the boat : every one must help to stop it."

" You will not act with us ?"

" M. d'Arci," I replied, " is too compromising an ally for me. We sing the same air, to be sure, but not in the same key. I return you your liberty, dear madame ; give me back mine." She left me, somewhat surprised at my cautious manner.

A few hours later Mademoiselle Holdenis came out upon the terrace with her pupil, who had recovered from her indisposition. She sat down upon a bench, and watched her

skipping. Madame d'Arci, who was taking a walk with her husband in another part of the garden, left him, and came towards Meta, whom she asked for the favour of a moment's conversation. "Darling," said she to the child, "go and play a little further off; we will call you back presently."

"If my governess says so," replied Lulu, looking up at Meta, whose eyes intimated, however, that she should go. She obeyed immediately.

"You exercise a strange empire over this little girl," said Madame d'Arci; "you govern her with a look."

"I love her much, madame; that is all my secret."

"I am persuaded, mademoiselle, that you are as good as you are intelligent, and that is what determines me to ask a favour of you—appealing to the delicacy of your feelings. You probably anticipate what I wish to say?"

"No, madame; but I am ready to listen to you."

"There is a woman not far off who is very unhappy: you are the involuntary cause of her sufferings. The attentions my father pays you, whether right or wrong, have made her jealous of you; and as her impressions are very strong, she has conceived fears which, no doubt, are exaggerated. Will you do nothing to restore her peace of mind and happiness?"

"What can I do, madame?"

"Leave as soon as possible, and thus take away with you our esteem and regrets."

"Did M. de Mauserre commission you to dismiss me? In that case I should obey most gladly; for I long to leave Les Charmilles, madame. I, too, am very unhappy here."

"My father has charged me with no message, mademoiselle."

"Then pray go and ask him, and obtain for me permission to leave. I shall be most grateful to you for it."

"What need is there for you to await such an order, mademoiselle? Does not your heart give it you?"

"If you were better informed, madame, you would know that, in a moment of trouble, when I was thinking of going away, M. de Mauserre obliged me to stay, and made me promise to await his consent."

"You astonish me, mademoiselle! Can such a promise detain you an hour longer in a house where, without wishing it, you have sown dissension, trouble, and grief?"

"I have promised, and I never lightly break my word."

"I should have thought," continued Madame d'Arci, getting excited, "that our duty commands us to sacrifice small obligations to greater ones."

"Perhaps we have not the same ideas about duty," replied she gently. "You have your conscience, I have mine."

"Yours is a very mysterious conscience, mademoiselle. Madame de Mauserre's despair leaves it strangely quiet."

"You are rash in your judgments, madame. Ask Madame de Mauserre; she will tell you whether I am indifferent to her troubles. And, since you seem to think that I owe you an account of my conduct, know, madame, that it is I who begged her to solicit and obtain my dismissal."

"Indeed, mademoiselle! Do you know what I should have done in your place? I should have been silent and should have gone."

"Ah, madame! whatever I might do, I should always be at fault in your estimation. The superb justice of the Countess d'Arci would not stoop to consider the rights of a poor girl who has nothing and is nothing. Happily there is a supreme judge above, who looks with an impartial eye both upon the great and the little."

"But," again said Madame d'Arci, whom this obstinate gentleness irritated more and more, "if Madame de Mauserre does not obtain his consent—"

"She will obtain it, never fear!" broke in Meta, with a half-smile. "Have a little patience. To-morrow, or the day

after, I shall have sunk back into my insignificance, and you will be for ever delivered from my importunate presence."

"But suppose that Madame de Mauserre, who is so far behind you in ingenuity and persuasiveness, and who understands nothing in the art of gaining a suit by skilful insinuations—suppose she goes awkwardly about it, and meets with a rebuff; may I ask what you intend to do then?"

"I shall pray to God, and ask him on my knees, and he will answer me," she added, raising her voice to heaven.

M. d'Arci had meanwhile come near, and, taking part in the conversation, he said bluntly: "I know your God, *mademoiselle*. He is the God of intriguers and hypocrites; and when you have asked this very obliging God on your knees, he will be very likely to answer: 'Don't go, pussy; there is here an income of two hundred thousand pounds to lay hold of—a nice little fortune which you may take'—weeping, of course, for your tears come easily; and to take is such a sad thing, that it naturally makes us weep. Zounds! I wish I could see on this terrace some honest atheist, that I might have the pleasure of kissing him on both cheeks!"

"My God holds blasphemy in horror, sir," replied she, rising from her seat, "but he always forgives those who indulge in it when they do not know what they say."

As she was going, he held her back by the arm, for he meant to have his say out; but at this moment, Lulu, who had got into a thicket, uttered a cry. Her governess ran to her. "A viper!" cried the child, starting back pale with terror, and pointing to the most innocent of blind worms.

"Don't be frightened," said Meta, taking her by the hand. "Vipers have flat heads, and do not look so friendly."

"Don't trust the natural history of your governess, Lulu," exclaimed M. d'Arci. "I know vipers that have no flat heads, and whose looks are all sweetness."

Meta interrupted him with a groan, and, fixing upon him

her eyes filled with tears, said : " Sir, when we are alone I am willing to put myself at your disposal ; but, I beseech you, do not insult me before this child."

And she took away Lulu, who, seeing her weep, turned upon M. d'Arcei, and looking at him with the angry air of an Eliakim before whom Jehovah is insulted, cried : " You wicked man, you make her cry ! I shall tell of you !"

As on the day before, neither Mademoiselle Holdenis nor Madame de Mauserre appeared at dinner. The meal was short and silent. After leaving the table I went to take a walk through the fields. Determined to have that very evening a decisive understanding with Meta, I resolved to seek her in her impenetrable nursery, and, if needs be, force my way through the window ; but I intended to wait till Lulu should be asleep.

The park had two entrances : one on the high road which led to Cremieux, the other into a wild ravine, the melancholy and nakedness of which pleased M. de Mauserre particularly, as it recalled to him certain places in the Roman Campagna. It was into this solitude that he would carry his reveries of an evening. He was in the habit of crossing the park and escaping through a little door closed by a bolt. By dint of as much perseverance as skill, he had taught his horse to push back the bolt, and he was more proud of this feat than of his " History of Florence." From the path which I followed, I could see him riding slowly down the main avenue. Absorbed in thought, he did not notice me. I allowed him to get ahead of me, and when I reached the little gate he had already disappeared.

A few moments later I was resting on the banks of a ravine at the edge of a deserted pathway. On my right I could see the immensity of the plain vanish into the gray of the approaching night. The last rosy lights of the setting sun were gradually dying away in the west. A few stars

were already visible, and the whole earth seemed to lie hushed under the silence of the heavens, with no other noise but the song of a cricket, and the sound of a scythe a belated mower was yet sharpening. Before me rose a hollow rock, whose sharp crests, crowned with milk thistles, stood out against the horizon. Under the doubtful twilight the most insignificant objects assume a sense, a certain air; they take attitudes and make gestures. Those thistles before me seemed to understand my thoughts and give me their opinion. The moon, too, came by-and-by to join in our conversation. It rose in the space between two mountains. I saw it appear at the end of a willow avenue, the branches joining above it and forming a daïs. I imagined that it detached itself from the sky, and hastened toward me, and that the willows trembled as it approached. All of which means, madame, that my mind was not in its usual state of composure; for I am not in the habit of thinking that the moon turns so easily out of its course for me. I stretched myself on the other side of the ditch, and closed my eyes. Any one passing by would have supposed me asleep; but I was not. I was thinking how to strengthen myself in a resolution of which I had to calculate the chances. Suddenly I jumped up, and found myself saying: "Hang all this cavilling! I am in love—nothing is more certain; and it is almost as certain that I am loved in return."

I had just returned into the park through the little gate, when I perceived, about a hundred steps from me, a shadow coming rapidly towards me. It ran, rather than walked. I slipped behind the trunk of a tree and watched its approach. It was Meta. She was wrapped in a brown cloak, the hood of which she had drawn over her head, and she was carrying a little travelling-bag. When she came up to where I was I suddenly left my hiding-place and stopped her. She started back affrighted. "Pray," said she, "let me pass."

“Where are you going so fast?”

“Right before me. I fly from a house where I am misjudged, hated, insulted. You do not know what they have said to me this morning. Why were you not there? You would have barked at me with the rest of the hounds.”

“I have never insulted you,” I replied. “I have scolded you well, perhaps. And have I not a right to do so, since, despite my reason, my suspicions, my just anger—in spite of all, I am foolish enough to love you still?”

A sigh, or rather a half-stifled cry, escaped her. “Do not mock me,” she stammered, “and let me pass.”

“No, I promised myself to come to an understanding with you this evening. Thanks to this favourable chance, I shall not be obliged to break in your door or scale your windows. One thing, however, troubles me now.”

She questioned me with a look. “Why,” said I, “did you choose this road to leave the house?”

“Because I thought I should not meet any one here.”

“I beg your pardon; you were, on the contrary, quite sure to meet some one who, you know, is in the habit of riding here, every evening.”

“I should have known very well how to avoid him,” she replied, quickly.

“I should be glad to think so; otherwise those barkers you speak of might accuse you of wishing thereby to secure yourself a triumphant return.”

She cried out in a tone of indignation, “Don’t you see how you, too, insult me!”

“Being jealous, I am also suspicious. And now, you may continue your journey, if you like. I will detain you no longer, but I shall know what to think of it.”

She threw her bag violently on the ground and dropped down on a bench. “O God!” she exclaimed, “everything seems to be impossible!”

I sat down by her, and said, "There is one thing possible, which would set all right, and that would be—"

"Oh, speak! I am so tired of the life I lead, that I promise to do anything you may advise."

"Well—bless me!—this possible solution would be, to marry me."

She started, and, raising her head slowly, looked at me with an air of stupor, and whispered, "I would give a great deal to know if you are speaking seriously."

"You are always doubting my seriousness," I replied, gently passing my arm around her waist. "I can't assume these funereal tones and drooping attitudes; I was not born a weeping-willow. But, on the other hand, I can bear testimony to myself that I have never deceived anybody. You know me; you know that I am simple-minded, and have but one word. My conduct has been clear; I thought I detected something equivocal in yours, and swore to give you up; but since the day you tried to drown me in the lake I have adored you! May my reason forgive me! The expression of your face in executing this master-stroke haunts me, pursues me. I see it in all my dreams. You did not succeed in dying with me, so let us go back to our first plan, which was by far the more sensible one, and let us live together and try to make each other as happy as possible. I told you once that I had never been in love except with Velasquez. I retract that speech. I love you as much as I do him, although in a different fashion, since it never came into my mind to marry him.

"My explanations may not, perhaps, be very clear, but my ideas, I am sure, are quite so. Now, would it be possible for you, on your side, not to adore me—I am not so exacting—but to love me a little, and to love no one but me? I ask you, for the last time, if you will consent to become my wife? and I promise, by the moon that looks upon us, to be a kind,

amiable, good-natured husband. Are we agreed? Silence gives consent. Only I wish this affair to be decided this evening, for I do not mean to leave you any longer to your hesitations, nor remain myself twenty-four hours longer in my perplexities. You shall go back to the house, now, where, after having thought the matter over, you shall write me a letter in which you shall answer me with a 'No' or a 'Yes' as clear, as precise, as tender as possible. Do not fear to exaggerate somewhat your sentiments or expressions; I shall not take advantage of your hyperboles. I am no coxcomb. To-morrow I shall present myself before M. de Mauserre with this letter in my hand, and shall say to him, squarely and roundly: 'Mademoiselle Holdenis had promised not to leave you. She is no longer her own mistress; she belongs to a certain individual who is to marry her, and this individual is myself. She will, therefore, start at once for Geneva, where she will await the day of our marriage.' "

I stopped a moment and listened; I thought I had heard the neighing of a horse. "If you do not like to write," I continued, "there will be some one passing here presently, to whom we can explain the matter, and—"

"Oh, no!" exclaimed she, "I do not wish to see him or speak with him. There is something in him that overawes me, frightens me. I would rather write. God be with us!"

With these words she rose hurriedly; then, bending over me, and with her two hands sealing hermetically both my eyes, she printed on my mouth a long kiss which made my head twist round like a Nuremberg top. She allowed me to enjoy the kiss, but would not let me see it. When she withdrew her hands, and I reopened my eyes, it seemed to me as if there were two or three moons in the sky, and that they poured over all the trees of the park a silver rain, which fell from branch to branch and leaf to leaf like sleet.

Meanwhile she had picked up her travelling-bag and lightly

hurried off. I ran after her. After a few steps I stopped, and, putting my hand on my heart, which beat as if it would break, "Tony," said I to myself, "don't do a reasonable thing heedlessly."

I had scarcely recovered from my emotion, when I perceived, upon the gravel of the walk, the shadow of a horse and its rider, and I heard a voice saying to me, "Is that you, Tony? I am very glad to have met you, for I have something to say. This morning they have allowed themselves, at the house, to grossly insult a person whom I esteem, and who has a right to my protection, since she belongs to my household. It seems that they have formed the plan of driving her from here by dint of ill-treatment and persecution. Be so kind as to hint to the inventor of this little plot that he plays a hard game, and that he runs the risk of driving me to extremes, which I shall perhaps be the first to regret." Then, without awaiting my reply, he spurred his horse, and the thicket soon concealed him from my sight.

In the course of the same evening Mademoiselle Holdenis called upon Madame de Mauserre. Finding the bolt drawn, she knocked timidly, and murmured: "Open, madame, I entreat you! I bring you good news."

The door opened. "Good news!" replied Madame de Mauserre, who could not control her feelings sufficiently to take the hand Meta held out to her; "and it is you that brings it?"

"How pale you are, madame! How sorry I am to find you so! But presently, when you have heard me, the roses will come back to your cheeks, and you will smile again as before. Know, then, madame— But I am so confused that I do not know where to begin."

She succeeded, however, at last in finding the beginning, and related the whole of the conversation she had had with me, and the conclusion we had come to. Madame de Mau-

serre was overcome with joy. She pressed her to her heart as if she meant to smother her.

"How I love you, my dear!" she exclaimed; "and you deserve it well, first because you have a heart of gold, honest and frank, and above all because you love Tony—for you love him, do you not? And you will marry him? Why did you keep it from me?"

"Forgive me, madame, but I could not disentangle my own feelings. I hesitated, questioned—was not sure I was loved. The first time he asked me to be his wife it was in such a half-jesting tone that I thought he was laughing at me. Another day he spoke to me so harshly that I fancied he despised me. I could not believe him, but to-day I have no more doubts. Good-bye, madame; I wish to ensure you a happy night, and, I think, I have succeeded."

She was going; Madame de Mauserre called her back. "But this letter to Tony, which is to save me and repair all—is it written?"

"I have such a poor head!" she replied. "I have just been a whole hour at my table, trying in vain to collect my ideas, which dance around me like rebellious schoolboys. Besides, my hand trembled so that the writing would hardly have been legible. I had better sleep over my emotion, and write to-morrow."

"To-morrow?"

"Have no fears; he shall get my letter before noon."

"No, my dear, you must write to-night; the morrow is not ours yet. I will help you. One succeeds sometimes with a little assistance; and, if your hand trembles, I will be your secretary; you will only have to recopy it."

In a minute, despite Meta's protestations and resistance, she had put upon the table her inkstand, pen, and writing-desk, from which she took a quire of pink paper. "See," said she, "what pretty paper! It will inspire us, for the epistle must be a very loving one—must it not?"

"He told me to make it as tender as possible," replied Meta, smiling, "and that's what troubles me. I am so inexperienced in this kind of literature."

"But I shall help you! See, I hold the pen: how shall we begin? I am going to write, 'Tony, I adore you!'"

"Oh, madame, pray spare my pride!" said she, holding back her hand. "And then, you call him Tony. You have the right, but I have never taken that liberty with him."

"You must take it to-day," replied Madame de Mauserre. "Don't forget that the letter we are going to compose is what is called in diplomacy an 'open letter.'"

After many tergiversations and discussions, the missive was finally written and ran as follows:

"What surprise and joy have prevented me from saying, I now write to you, Tony. But why must I write? I thought I had told you all, without saying a word. Did I dream that one evening we sat together—that the neighing of a horse startled us—that I escaped from your arm around my waist—and that, before flying— That kiss, Tony, was it not an answer? Do you need another? And is it true that you distrust me? Be satisfied, then; this letter shall inform you, in case you do not know it, that I love you—that my heart has been wholly yours for a long time. Tony, I abandon to you the care of my destiny. I am ready to follow you to the end of the world. Do not deceive me. The day you are ready I will be your wife."

After having written the last word of the rough draft, which she read over aloud: "Excellent!" cried Madame de Mauserre. "Now the date. Quick to work, my pet! Here is the paper. Does your hand still tremble?"

"No, madame," replied Meta; and she dipped the pen resolutely into the inkstand.

"One moment!" observed Madame de Mauserre; "I forgot that the paper is stamped with my monogram. If he

noticed it, he might see that I have had something to do with it—that I have prompted you. You can copy it in your room, by-and-by. Are you sure you remember it all, or do you want to take this little bit of pink paper with you ?”

“Oh, no, madame !” replied Meta, gaily, “I know my romance by heart. Shall I recite it ?” And, so saying, she twisted up the sheet of pink paper, and was about to burn it at the light, when Madame de Mauserre took it from her and put it into her desk.

“I am still afraid that you may change your mind. This draught is a witness, and I mean to keep it till to-morrow, to confront you with it if your copy should not be exact. If needs be, I shall show it to Tony. Now, you are obliged to transcribe it faithfully. You must swear it by all the tears you have cost me !”

Thereupon she took both her hands, pressed them, and cried, as the door closed upon her, “Either I am much deceived, or ere long my patient will be cured, and I shall be the most comforted of women.”

XI.

THE next day was one of such great emotions that I do not like to recall it. Fortunately, there are not many such in my life. I awoke in the best of humours ; everything looked bright, especially my matrimonial prospects. I felt satisfied with myself, with my conduct, with my wisdom, with the engagement I had entered into. Far from regretting my lost liberty, I blessed the collar I had myself put on my neck.

I waited the whole morning for Meta’s letter. I wondered she should keep me waiting for it, but I was not uneasy ; I felt as sure of her heart as of my own. I had prepared my speech to M. de Mauserre—preface, exordium, and peroration.

It was from one end to the other a piece of admirable eloquence, and seemed to me of irresistible effect.

Twelve o'clock struck. I had not received anything yet, and I began to grow impatient. I went out. On passing M. de Mauserre's room I saw in it a large trunk, which his servant was packing full of clothes. This trunk gave me something to think about, and I arrived at the conclusion that M. de Mauserre, having made, as he awoke, wise reflections, had settled in his mind that travelling was the best way to forget, and had forthwith resolved to visit the country where oranges grow and where no Metas are. This determination appeared to me honourable and worthy of him. I was surprised to find Madame de Mauserre in the dining-room, having at last abandoned her seclusion. She was pale, and looked serious, but her eyes were hopeful.

I was not mistaken in my conjecture. M. de Mauserre announced to us at luncheon that he had researches to make in the archives of Florence, and would set out for Italy that evening or the next day. M. d'Arce kept sufficient mastery over his feelings to conceal the extreme satisfaction this news gave him. I do not know what exclamation might not have escaped Madame de Mauserre if my eye had not met hers and enjoined silence; so she remained quiet. As for Meta, I thought I detected a change in her humour and countenance. She had a long face; her eyebrows twitched; her eyes looked askance; her voice became tremulous, and sounded muffled. I knew from experience the singular fluctuations of her moods; twice already had this quicksand drifted under me. But I felt that day as merry as a lark, and drove from my mind all sinister forebodings.

After luncheon I found myself alone with Madame de Mauserre in the parlour. "I fancy you are content now!" said I.

"How can I be, Tony? He must love her very much to have to travel in order to alleviate his chagrin."

"Dear me!" I replied, laughing, "you are over-exacting, indeed! Deprive Lulu of her doll, and you would surely allow her to pout for four-and-twenty hours. At certain moments great men are Lulus."

"And heaven knows when he will come back!"

"Oh, he will come back, madame, as soon as Mademoiselle Holdenis is no longer here."

"Ah, Tony, I have a great mind to ask him—"

"Ask nothing—accept what he offers. Go back to your room, I beseech you, and, when he comes to bid you good-bye, kiss him tenderly, without appearing either to blame or approve him. The one would be as fatal as the other."

"I shall do what you say, for are you not my deliverer? It is you who have caused him to fly from the peril."

"You are mistaken; I have done nothing to bring about this resolution."

"Why, yes, you have! Mademoiselle Holdenis told me all. Why should you be so reserved with me? Confess that—"

She was interrupted. M. de Mauserre came in abruptly, and looked at us both with a somewhat suspicious air. This look troubled her. She became embarrassed, and went out. He then came up to me, and said: "I am sorry, Tony, always to disturb you in your mysterious confabulations with Madame de Mauserre, but I have a rather uncourteous communication to make, which much embarrasses me."

He looked so unhappy that I answered him: "What can embarrass you so? I should find it very hard to refuse you anything to-day."

"I went to see Mademoiselle Holdenis this morning, to announce to her my departure, and to beg her to remain here until Madame de Mauserre should have found some one to take her place. She consented, out of love for my daughter, but on one condition."

"Which is—if you please?"

“That you will return this very evening to Paris, because—and these are her own words—it would be impossible for her to stay one day longer at Les Charmilles with you.”

I felt dumbfounded. I was beside myself between doubt and anger. For two or three seconds I felt as if the floor were rocking or rolling under me like the deck of a ship at sea.

M. de Mauserre took a malicious pleasure in my discomfiture. “What have you done to her?” he continued. “I thought you were on the best of terms with each other? I questioned her, but she intrenched herself in an impenetrable silence.”

“I don’t know, any more than you,” I replied, trying to recover my composure and straighten my face. “It does not matter; I shall be gone this evening.”

“Without ill-feeling, I hope?” he said, with a return of kindness. “I talk freely to you, as I would to an old friend. But look here! do better—wait till to-morrow, and come with me to Florence.”

“Oh, no!” I replied. “I have no researches to make in the archives, and I long to get back to my studio in Paris.”

Thereupon he left me, and as soon as he was gone, I ran and knocked violently at the nursery-door. No answer. I persisted, but the door was fastened, and resisted all my efforts. I then went to breathe awhile on the terrace; I stood dreadfully in need of it. At the farthest end of the kitchen-garden I perceived Lulu, who was accompanied only by her maid. I concluded, from that, that her governess must be in her bedchamber, engaged in some business or other. I returned to her door, but did not knock. M. de Mauserre was with her, and I heard them talk in a pretty high key. I came back an hour later; this time I entered, but the bird had flown. I went up-stairs, to my room, and commenced to pack. All at once I caught sight of my tormentor from the window. She had gone down-stairs to seek

her pupil in the park, and was bringing her back into the house. I flew down, reached the front steps as she was coming up, and met her scolding a chambermaid in an unusually commanding tone. Her accustomed meekness was gone, and her face, her brows, her Semiramis-attitude, struck me with wonder. When she had done scolding, she watched awhile a hawk, that hovered over the house, uttering sharp cries. Her lips were tightly closed, her nostrils inflated. It seemed to me as if she, too, scented a prey, and that there was in her heart a hungry hawk, which, like the one above, flapped its wings and screamed for food. She ascended the steps as if taking them by storm; her elastic, conquering feet, seemed to say, "This place is mine!" I was leaning against the baluster with folded arms, waiting for her. She looked at me as if I had been a total stranger—as if she had never seen me, never spoken to me, and was trying to guess who I might be. None but an idle story-teller could have pretended that the evening before she had printed so ardent a kiss on my lips. I had not the strength to utter a word. She passed by. It would have been easier for me to strangle her than speak to her.

As I was hastening back to my room, Madame d'Arci, who was much agitated, took me by the button, and, drawing me into the parlonr, asked, in a tremulous voice, "What is going on, do you think?"

"I don't know, and hang me if I care to know!" I replied. "Everything is possible—even the impossible."

I tried to get away, but she held me back. "Pray listen to me, and advise me. Just now, with M. d'Arci's assent, I went to my father to offer to accompany him to Florence. Mademoiselle Holdenis was with him; they have been together the whole afternoon, now in her room, now in his. In crossing the hall I heard him say, 'Furnish me with proof, and I promise you that I will take no revenge.' On seeing

me he stopped short, and when I told him what had brought me, he begged me to go, adding, 'I have given up my journey!'

"I tell you that the only thing I just now wonder at is, to find myself still here!" I replied, with anger. "But I shall not stay here much longer. This house has become odious to me. I am tired of women that cry all the time, and have to be consoled with lies. I am tired of women that lie, and of spending my time in making out their riddles. I am tired of seeing two men, who are not absolutely fools, led by the nose by a pretty-faced cheat and intriguer. I am tired of my blunders and other people's blunders—tired, in short, of hearing the verb 'to go' conjugated every day: She shall go, I shall go, we shall go—and nobody going but me. Hang it! Let those stay in this bewitched house who like, but I shall not risk my cheerfulness, my youth, and my talent by remaining here any longer."

I immediately ordered one of the servants to engage a carriage for me at Cremieux, and returned to my room, determined to stay there quietly until my departure, and bid no one good-bye. However, I had no sooner strapped my trunks, than it seemed to me impossible to leave without knowing what had actually taken place, and what pretext Meta could have invented to get rid of me; why M. de Mauserre, after having announced to us his departure, had so suddenly given it up; what the words meant, "Furnish me with proof, and I promise you that I will take no revenge." I began to suspect, under all this, some dark machination, and lost myself in conjectures. The sun had just set. I started to see M. de Mauserre, and entered his rooms without even knocking; but he was not there. I learned from a servant that he had just gone down to his wife. I went in search of him, and a very unexpected scene was awaiting me there.

Madame de Mauserre had conformed to my instructions in

every point ; she had spent the whole afternoon in her room without exchanging a word with any one, and had only gone out to take a short drive. She was just coming back and had her hat still on, when M. de Mauserre entered. "Alphonse," said she to him, "I hope to learn from yourself that you have given up your journey."

"You shall learn from me," he replied, "how a man may be very sure of his intentions, and yet find himself obliged to change his mind three times during the day. This morning I meant to start alone ; two hours ago I thought of taking Lulu with me—"

"And her governess?" interrupted she, quickly.

"Perhaps. But don't be uneasy ; I am obliged to stay here on important business."

"What business, Alphonse? What's the matter?"

"This morning, then," continued M. de Mauserre, striving to be calm, "when I communicated my project to Mademoiselle Holdenis, she could not restrain an expression of anxiety, and gave me to understand that I did wrong in going away. A moment later, when I requested her to stay a few days longer at Les Charmilles, she assented, on condition that M. Flamerin should leave the house this evening and return to Paris. You must confess that there was enough in all this to excite my curiosity. I went back to her this afternoon, urged her to answer me, and overwhelmed her with questions. For more than an hour I cross-questioned her, till she complained that I tortured her. At last I succeeded in extorting her secret from her. But a simple affirmation did not suffice ; I wanted proofs. In order to obtain them, I made her a solemn promise that I would not take vengeance, and that I should leave without mentioning the matter to you. Such promises are not binding ; I should never be able to keep them. You know who I am, and what M. Flamerin may expect from me."

"Do I hear right?" she exclaimed. "You mean to take vengeance on M. Flamerin because he has the audacity to love Mademoiselle Holdenis, and wishes to marry her?"

"This comedy is ended, and cannot serve you any longer. Tony managed matters so well that I got on a wrong scent; but I tell you that at this moment I know all, and that I hold in my hand the proof that he is your lover."

She stood speechless, unable to believe her ears, and wondering whether she was not dreaming. She repeated, mechanically: "You have the proof that Tony— Alphonse, are you in your senses?" Suddenly a ray of light shot through her mind; she ran to her table and hurriedly opened her desk.

"I am beforehand with you; here is what you are looking for," said M. de Mauserre, as he drew from a note-book the dangerous pink paper and presented it to her.

Madame de Mauserre told me afterwards that at that instant she felt her soul rent asunder, divided, as it was, between the horror of a perfidy her imagination was unable to grasp, and the crazy joy of finding that M. de Mauserre still loved her enough to be jealous. When she recovered from her stupor, she flew to the bell-rope and rang feverishly, saying, "Mademoiselle Holdenis shall come; I intend her to explain all this herself."

A few minutes after Meta appeared, and Madame de Mauserre wondered, as I had done before, at the sudden change visible in her behaviour and face. With her head thrown back, her firm-set lips, her rapid and laconic speech, the hard expression of her eyes, she had all the attitude of a person who had just taken a bold decision, and was resolved to play with Fate a game she was determined to win, cost what it might. Madame de Mauserre examined her an instant in silence. "I have sent for you, my dear," she said, "to inquire about your marriage."

"What marriage, madame?—with whom?"

"With M. Flamerin. Is it given up? Projects are made and given up in this house with an unheard-of facility."

"I know nothing of this one, madame."

"You do not remember that yesterday you had in the park a close conference with Tony—that he asked for your hand—that it was agreed between you two that you should write to him, and that your letter should be shown to M. de Mauserre?"

"I really do not know what you mean, madame."

"Is it I who am speaking to you?—is it you who answer me? Is it false that last evening we composed together the draught of this letter—that we were seated, you and I, at the table—that I held the pen, and that I wrote at your dictation?"

"Surely, madame, you must have dreamed all this!"

Madame de Mauserre approached Meta, looked closely into her eyes, and for the first time saw their depths; and what she saw was enough to make her start back. "Oh, mademoiselle," she cried, "you frighten me! Who and what are you?"

"This is indeed asking too much!" said M. de Mauserre. "How can you expect her to support you with her testimony in so unlikely an explanation? You should have intimated it to her, and arranged it with her beforehand."

At this moment I entered the room, and cast about me wondering eyes, trying to guess what scene was being played between this man, who affected calmness so ill, and these two women, of whom one looked demented, and the other presented the pallor and fearful rigidity of a statue.

"Come, Tony!" cried Madame de Mauserre. "The most extraordinary things are taking place here. Imagine that you are my lover—that Mademoiselle Holdenis affirms it, and that M. de Mauserre believes it!"

I took up the pink paper she was pointing at. After having read it, I cried, "The man who could seriously believe that this letter was written to me by Madame de Mauserre must be insane !"

She then came up to me, and in a broken voice commenced a story I had great difficulty in following. M. de Mauserre interrupted us. "This is not the place to explain matters," said he to me in an authoritative tone; adding in a threatening manner, "Let us go out and settle this affair face to face."

Madame de Mauserre ran to place herself between the door and him. "Mademoiselle Holdenis," said she to Meta, "will you maintain to the end a lie which puts two lives in danger?"

I, too, approached Meta. She could not bear my look, which was to her apparently as terrible as that of a judge in his gown. I saw her face gradually relax and lose its firmness. Her action had been too high-strung and exacting for her courage; she was giving way under it. I fancied I was witnessing the crumbling down of a strong will, and I saw the moment when her limbs would support her no longer, and when she would fall on her knees. She succeeded, however, in keeping herself up, and preserved, amid this general exhaustion of power, a sombre pride.

"Do not look at me, madame," said she to Madame de Mauserre, who had again approached her; "do not speak to me, or I shall confess nothing. Despite all my efforts, I could never love you. I hate you! You are rich, I am poor; you are handsome, I am not; and your kindness has been full of concealed insolence. I often thought that it would be a meritorious act to deprive you of your happiness, which is the unjust reward of a fault, and which you are wrong in showing so much. Last night your joy pained me, and I left you with bitter feelings." Then, turning to M. de Mauserre: "Yes, sir, the vengeance you meditate would be a crime,

for the statement I gave you was a falsehood. But are not you guilty of the same, in giving me your word of honour that you loved me enough not to take vengeance?"

So saying, she started from the wall against which she was leaning, and crossed the room to reach the door. On passing before me she uttered a cry of despair, and stammered, "Why was I not allowed to die, a week ago, in Lake Paladru?"

When she was gone, M. de Mauserre remained a few moments motionless; there was no colour in his face, and he could not speak. Was he glad, or sorry? I fancy he was both. He found himself in the state of mind of a man who has made a big error in his account-book, and who goes over his reckoning, wondering how it was possible he could have made such a mistake—both confused at his stupidity and glad to have found it out in time. His eyes were fastened on the floor. He raised them, and fixed them a moment upon the door through which had just gone and disappeared for ever a dream, one which he perhaps regretted. I imagine he was considering by what means, or how, he could replace it. Human nature has such a horror of a void. It is possible, also, that I presume too much, and that he did not exactly know what to think or to do. It is certain, however, that he came to himself, embraced me, and said, in a tremulous voice, "Will you ever forgive me?"

"Never!" I replied. "Don't expect it. I intend to write forthwith a book entitled, 'On the Stupidity of Sensible Men.'" And I added, "But here is one whose indulgence you need more than mine."

And, taking him by the hand, I led him toward Madame de Mauserre. She looked at him a long while with an undefinable smile, and, bursting into tears, fell on my neck, crying, "I must forgive him, my good Tony, for was he not going to kill you!"

XII.

I KNOW, dear madame, that you do me the kindness to think me talented, but you have always doubted my good sense. I do not know what you will presently think on this subject ; but I am prouder of what I am going to relate next, than of the best of my pictures.

M. d'Arci had spent the evening in my chamber. He had learned all, and was so excited that he did not know where he was. "Thank heaven, we have escaped ! It is true, then, that the wicked often destroy their own work. Indeed, Mademoiselle Holdenis is more candid than I supposed her to be ; she has innocently brought together those she had intended to part for ever. How was it she did not understand that jealousy often survives love, and in certain cases resuscitates it ? The man who is most indifferent to his property will involuntarily put his hands to his pockets when he hears the cry of 'Stop thief !' "

"And what is more," I answered, "M. de Mauserre has thus learned that it is not so easy as one thinks to get rid of remembrances. We fancy them dead, and all at once they start out unexpectedly from some obscure corner, and take us by the throat. The better way is to keep friends with them."

"Perhaps," he replied ; "but we have, indeed, had a narrow escape. Ah, the witch !" And he relieved himself with a furious rubbing of hands.

He left me towards midnight. All that had been going on within and around me, during the last twenty-four hours, had so excited me, that, unable to sleep, I gave up going to bed altogether. I paced up and down my room, and resolved to keep up the exercise till morning. I wished

particularly to witness Meta's departure from the top of my tower. I felt that not till then could I expect to recover my equanimity; that, to breathe freely again, I must see with my own eyes the carriage that took away this enemy of my repose disappear behind the trees, and be sure that she was gone. I had scarcely finished reading the most unpleasant chapter in the book of my life, and I was in haste to turn over the page.

Thus I walked up and down, trying to think of my Boabdil's cloak, or of the theory of complementary colours, and caught myself again and again thinking of something else. At times I leaned on the window-ledge, and contemplated the clumps of trees that stood out against the starry sky, a confused row of roofs, and two weathercocks creaking in the wind. It seemed to me as if weathercocks, trees and roofs felt some great commotion, and were endeavouring to recover from it, and that the whole house was like a chicken-coop that had just been visited by a weasel.

All at once I heard a scratch at my door; I listened. Another scratch; I cried, "Who is there?" The door was opened, and Meta Holdenis appeared, dressed in her gray gown, with her neatly-plaited habit-shirt, over which hung, as usual, the cornelian cross. It was her morning toilet; but I thought I could see that the habit-shirt, the collar of which caressed her chin, was spotless, and that she must have taken it fresh from the drawer, to do me the honour of it. She herself seemed to me a new Meta—a Meta I had not yet seen. There was a humid brilliancy about her eyes, expressive of unusual sweetness. They had been weeping, and were dilated by suffering; they were so large that they swallowed up, as it were, the lower part of her face and the somewhat angular contour of her chin. The forehead swam in light; it seemed as if the cherub of grief and repentance had poured a celestial dew over it. Beauty becomes mono-

tonous, but it is different with faces of character; they appear always new, and constantly furnish us with fresh surprises.

An artist, madame, is like everybody, subject to anger, indignation, and contempt; but his anger is sometimes at the mercy of his eyes. He thinks, with Bridgson, that form is a great thing, and has indulgences for crimes that are accompanied by fine effects of light. My first impulse was to take a pencil, and to say to the singular person who was paying me this nocturnal visit, "Stop!—stand where you are, on the threshold of this door, and don't budge till I've sketched you!" But I bethought myself. New as she appeared to me, my recollections awoke, and saluted her by her real name. I recognised distinctly the flexible and graceful form which I had held in my arms, the two hands that had rested on my eyes, the mouth whose kisses were as cheap as its promises.

I turned away, and made a very expressive sign, which meant, "Begone!" She started back; then, as if mustering new courage, she entered the room and shut the door. And so, behold her alone with me, and in my room! The clock struck two.

"What do you want with me?" I cried, rudely. "Don't you see how odious you are to me?"

"Take pity on me," replied she, in a faltering voice. "I wish, before I leave, to curse my fault before you, and implore your pardon on my knees." She then threw herself on a chair, leaned both her elbows on the table, and, overwhelming me with an abundance of tears and adjectives, began what she called her confession—a wordy speech, incoherent and contradictory, in which I found it very difficult to distinguish truth from falsehood. Whatever she said, she half believed she was telling the truth. It was not so much a false soul as a perverted conscience. Accustomed at an

early age to the gymnastics of sophistry, she had contracted a fatal suppleness and the habit of persuading herself into anything she pleased. Gymnastics are a good thing, madame, but they should be used with discretion. Do not allow your children to be exercised in dislocating their limbs or walking on their heads; and do not allow their consciences too much reasoning. Better, by far, be a dullard than a juggler! If ever I am a father, that shall be my maxim.

Meta began her defence very systematically. She accused herself with merciless harshness—rated her conduct in the most abusive terms. Gradually she began, not exactly to exculpate herself, but to plead extenuating circumstances as a palliation for her faults. Her excuses would have been impudent if they had not been so *naïve*. She told me that when M. de Mauserre came to see her, to announce his departure to her, she felt piqued at the facility with which he left her; that her coquetry (that was the very word she used) rebelled, and that she thought, then, all of a sudden, of the terrible use she could make of the pink letter-paper; that, at first, she repelled such an idea with horror, but that it fastened upon her, and the next moment she embraced it in a sort of blind and irresistible frenzy. She compared the fatal temptation to which she fell a victim to a sort of hallucination, and to the fearful attraction a precipice exercises over one looking dizzily into its depths. She concluded by saying that it was a trial sent by God, who, in letting her succumb to temptation, had wished to teach her the divine virtue of repentance, of which she was as yet ignorant.

Thus she spoke: I say, again, it was a juggling conscience, blindfolded. The balls started, flew, crossed each other in the air. Tony Flamerin would have applauded, had he not preferred being indignant.

“Indeed!” said I, interrupting her. “Henceforth, the thief that shall break open a secretary may allege that he

was in a state of hallucination ; the son that kills his father will complain that he was seized with vertigo—the dagger only conceived the idea, the hand followed it, the will was absent—and will not have the least difficulty in proving an *alibi*. Robbers and assassins must no longer be condemned. God induced them to do wrong, in order to perfect them by repentance. All very fine! But there is still one point that makes me hesitate, and that is, that it is not enough to persuade one's self, the judge must be persuaded also."

She interrupted me in her turn, and, drawing from her pocket a letter she had received from her father in the morning, "That's what ruined me," she said.

I took the missive, which was rather a voluminous one, and looked rapidly over its first pages. M. Holdenis gave his daughter very circumstantial news of the whole dove-cot, talking at length about her younger sisters and little brothers, assuring her, as it seemed to me, of Hermann's, Thecla's, Aennchen's, Minnchen's, and Lenchen's daily encouraging progress in ideality. "Only think!" said one of the paragraphs, "yesterday our dear little Nicholas, after having looked at the sky, which was pure as thy heart, cried, 'How do you do, dear God?' This *naïve* exclamation moved thy good mother and myself to tears."

However interested I was in little Nicholas, I read far more attentively the last page of the letter, which ran thus :

"The confidences you have made us, dear angel, have plunged us in an inexpressible perplexity. Consider well before you decide upon sacrificing the brilliant prospects that open before you. You tell us that your heart is his. I answer you: Do not believe your heart too readily, dear child. The distance that separates us prevents my advising you ; but how can I believe that heaven should destine as a husband for our Meta a man who worships no God but his talent—and, let me add, a man who has behaved so shame-

fully towards your father, and who will never be of any assistance to him? The more I think of the combination of the truly providential circumstances to which you owe your acquaintance with M. de Mauserre, the more I recognise in them a mysterious intention of Supreme Wisdom to bring you and this distinguished man together. God means, no doubt, to purify his heart and the use he makes of his wealth. Impious men attribute everything to chance. There is no chance. God has visibly chosen you to make his light shine before the world; how guilty would you be, then, if, from wickedness or from a thoughtless inclination of your romantic imagination, you should refuse the high position to which He seems to call you! Dear angel, think—think well! and in your thoughts do not forget your poor father, who embraces you as he loves you.”

The reading of this stuff had rather a calming effect upon me. My anger gave place to mirth. It was a long time since I had read any of M. Holdenis’s prose. His little providential theories seemed to harmonise admirably with that face of his, beaming with the consciousness of being one of the elect.

“Why did you show me this letter?” I asked Meta. “I shall never believe that this wretched piece of paper had the least influence upon your decisions. Why did not you do as I do now?” And I tore the eight sheets that composed the paternal epistle into a thousand little bits, which I took special pleasure in seeing fly about the room like so many pretty butterflies.

“I meant to prove to you thereby,” she replied, “that appearances are often deceitful.” She stopped an instant; her skein was getting entangled; but she soon remedied this momentary embarrassment of mind and tongue, and casting down her eyes, she continued: “Does not this letter prove to you that, if sometimes I may have appeared to you faithless, my heart never was?” And, without giving me time

to put in a word, she told me impetuously that she had always loved me; that she never got over my departure from Geneva; that my image had remained engraven in her heart; that she had only come to Les Charmilles on the assurance Harris had given her that she would meet me there. Next she complained of me; pretended that she had never known what to think exactly of my feelings for her; that I had always treated the matter so jestingly; that she continually doubted my love; the rather taunting declaration I had made her in the cemetery had wounded her feelings; in encouraging M. de Mauserre's attentions her purpose had been to excite my jealousy; she was far from foreseeing the fatal consequences of this game: in short, what had happened was a good deal my own fault; the very interview in the park had left her in doubt. She had questioned the seriousness of my sentiments, and wondered whether I should not seize upon the first pretext that presented itself to break my word.

At these words I burst into a Homeric laugh, and, having installed myself in an arm-chair as far as possible from her, I said: "That beats all, my dear! By-and-by I shall be the only criminal in the case. It is my treachery, my perfidy, that has driven you to the course you have taken. You will make me believe that the other evening, after having tenderly kissed you, I ran to offer my heart and lips to another woman! Can't you, for once in your life, be sincere, and confess that, if you are more sensible than tender, you are still more ambitious than sensible? The secret of your conduct lies in the prophecy of the gipsy. Confess that women of your stamp are in the habit of chasing two hares at the same time, and that you have been trying the experiment to aim in turns at a rabbit—your humble servant here—and at a hare, sometimes called Baron Grüneck and sometimes M. de Mauserre. The hare is off; I dare you now to catch the rabbit!"

She uttered a cry of horror, and ordered me to be silent, and not insult her love for me. At last, however, she confessed that there was some truth in my explanation. "Well, yes, then!" cried she, in a heart-rending tone. "Yes, yesterday I had two souls fighting within me as for life and death. God be praised, one of them fell, shattered by misfortune; but the other lives, and lives to love you, and you alone!"

A few seconds after, before I knew what she was doing, she was at my feet, and, despite all my endeavours to free myself from her, she had taken both my hands. I wish I could repeat to you the outbursts of eloquence she wasted on me. My modesty forbids reiterating the tender and passionate declarations she made me—to wit, that she adored me; that her conduct towards me had been unqualifiably blameworthy; that, if I would pardon her, her whole life should be employed to atone for these wrongs; that I should be loved as no man had ever been loved; that I had no idea of the treasures of enthusiasm and devotion buried in her heart; that she would henceforth live, breathe, for me alone; that I should be her all—her universe, her ideal, and her God.

At the risk of passing for a coxcomb in your eyes, I shall say that at that moment she was sincere. I will add that, whether sincere or not, she was strangely beautiful—with a beauty both devilish and angelic. Grief and passion seemed to model her face, as the fingers of the sculptor model the clay he fashions. On her neck, cheeks, and brow, there played a change of lights and shades, the secret of which I shall despair ever to discover. In the vivacity of her movements her hair had become loose, and fell in rich disorder over her shoulders; her habit-shirt also had suffered some damage, and gave my eyes a perilous liberty. Her lips were burning, her liquid eyes fixed on mine. They said, plainly: "Do you not see that I am yours? Do with me as you please!" But they said also, as in a little aside, "If you

succumb to the temptation, you must keep me, and I shall marry you !”

It was, madame, I confess, a critical moment. I was dreadfully agitated ; I could hardly breathe. My head swam in a thousand lights, and I really do not know how this scene might have ended, when suddenly, madame, one of the cocks of the château began to crow lustily in the farm-yard. His clear, piercing, metallic, warlike voice made me start in my chair. I again saw my father on his death-bed ; he was looking at me. The cock crowed again, and I heard the cooper of Beaune calling to me, “Tony, life is a combat ; mistrust your impulses !” and, the cock having for the third time sounded his war-trumpet, I looked fixedly at Meta. It seemed to me that her large, limpid eyes resembled the azure waters of those beautiful African lakes in which the crocodiles live.

She watched me anxiously, wondering what I could be thinking about. I pushed her gently away, got up, obliged her to do the same, took her by the arm, led her across the room, opened the door, and pointed to the stairs and the lamp that lighted them. She grew faint, but immediately recovered herself. Tumbling her hair with her hand, she cried to me, as if suddenly seized with the fury of a sybil, “Cursed be the woman you shall love !” With that she vanished like a ghost.

Three hours later she had quitted Les Charmilles, where her departure left some hearts easier and a little girl inconsolable. On hearing the carriage roll away that took her governess, the poor child rent the air with her cries.

Is it necessary to add that M. and Madame de Mauserre are married ? Lulu will henceforth have no other teacher but her mother, who, since this experience, has become less trustful and an earlier riser.

M. de Mauserre has re-entered public life, and is a deputy ; his seat in the Chamber is on the most sensible side of the Right Centre, but he takes care now and then to vote against the Government. It was said, the other day, that he was about to receive a very important official position.

One night last winter I was travelling from Lyons to Valence, where I was going to visit a friend. I was alone in my compartment of the railway carriage when we left Perrache ; it was lighted by a dim light, and I pulled my fur cap over my eyes, settling myself to sleep, when, at Vienne, three women entered. By their costume I judged them to be Protestant deaconesses, and, from their conversation, I gathered that they were going to Italy to take charge of an evangelical school. They were young, and inclined to prattle. Speaking German, they did not hesitate to continue their conversation before me. With my face buried in the collar of my cloak, I gave no sign of life ; but I was listening !

One of the three seemed to exercise over the two others the prestige of an abbess, and, although her voice was sweet, there was a tone of authority about it that bordered on arrogance. In speaking of the last war, she remarked that the French were an amiable nation enough, but very immoral, and sadly corrupted. As a proof of this, she related as a positive fact that, having entered as governess a French family where a painter of great reputation was just then visiting, he dared, on the very first day, to make her a wild declaration of love ; and that the father of her pupil, having declared himself also in love with her, had used every means to seduce her ; that these two amorous men, crazed by jealousy, came near blowing each other's brains out ; and that, to get rid of their attentions, she was obliged to fly from the house by night, amid a thousand perils, from which only divine grace could have saved her.

When the train reached Valence the conversation had

ceased. The two youngest of these daughters of Zion slept the sleep of innocence ; the third—namely, the one who spoke so well—with eyes half closed, was thinking, no doubt, about her past or probable future. Before she got out I leaned forward, and, to her great surprise, recited to her the two first lines of “The King of Thule,” which I took the liberty—may Goethe forgive me !—to retouch a little. I whispered in her ear,

“ A mouse that lived in Thule
Told falsehoods to her grave.”

You will perhaps ask me, madame, if my heart is quite cured, and if I do not still think sometimes of this little mouse ? This is my secret, however, and I leave it to you to guess. You will also ask me what is to be concluded from my story, for you do not like stories that come to no conclusion. Mine is to prove that it is well to hear the crowing of the cock and mind its meaning. If my father had not taught me this beautiful lesson, I might perhaps be now making the journey through life with a very distinguished but very dangerous partner.

Next, my story serves to explain how, in offering me the hand of a charming person with blue eyes, you have put me on my guard. I confess that azure eyes scare me : one has to look at them very closely, and into their very depths. God bless you, madame, you have not two souls—may heaven preserve us both from quagmires, from an irresolute will, from equivocal characters, from troubled hearts, and from subtle consciences.

A STROKE OF DIPLOMACY.

I.

ONE evening, on his return home from dining at his club, the Marquis de Miraval found a letter from his niece, Madame de Penneville, who wrote to him from Vichy, as follows :—

“My dear Uncle,—The waters here have done me a great deal of good. Until to-day I had every reason to be entirely satisfied with my cure ; but I am afraid the good result which I expected will be undone by a disagreeable piece of news I have just received, which causes me more trouble and annoyance than I can well express to you. The physicians insist that the first thing necessary for those who suffer from a chronic disorder of the liver is to keep free from anxiety. I create none for myself, but others cause me enough. My mind is tormented with the thought of a certain Madame Corneuil, for that is the woman’s name. I never heard of her, but I detest her without knowing her. You have seen a great deal of the world, and are somewhat inquisitive. I am convinced, my dear uncle, that you know all about her. Write me word at once who this Madame Corneuil may be. It is a serious question to me. The reason why I will explain to you some other time.”

The Marquis de Miraval was an old diplomatist, who had commenced his career under Louis Philippe, and had likewise filled honourably, under the empire, several second-rate positions, which satisfied his ambition. When thrust aside

by the revolution of September 4th, he bore it philosophically. Unlike his niece, he had no trouble with his liver. Neither that nor his spleen ever disturbed him in the least. He was in excellent health, his stomach seemed like iron, his gait was still firm, his sight clear, and he had an income of two hundred thousand francs, which is injurious to no one. As he always looked on the bright side of things, he congratulated himself upon having reached the age of sixty-five without losing his hair, which was literally as white as snow ; but he never thought of dyeing it.

As he bore no grudge to age for whitening his abundant chestnut locks, of which he used to be rather vain, so the marquis easily forgave the revolutions which so prematurely closed his career. A man has a right to rail against his judge for twenty-four hours, so, after relieving his anger by a few well-directed epigrams, Monsieur de Miraval soon consoled himself for those events which condemned him to be of no importance in affairs of state, but which restored him his independence by way of compensation. Liberty had always seemed to him the most precious of all possessions ; he considered that man happy who was responsible only to himself and could order his life as he chose. For this reason he decided to remain a widower, after having been married two years. In vain he was urged to marry again, answering in the words of a celebrated painter, " Would it be so delightful, then, on going home to find a stranger there ? "

Whether sage or egotist, the Marquis de Miraval had sincere affection for his niece, the Countess de Penneville, and he considered it his duty to reply to her by return of post. His answer was to this effect :

" My dear Mathilde,—I infinitely regret that your cure should be retarded by cares and worries. They are the worst of all diseases, although they kill no one. But what is the

matter, and what has Madame Corneuil to do with it? What can there be between this woman, whom you do not know, and the Countess de Penneville? I ask for a prompt explanation. While awaiting this, since you desire it, I will tell you, as best I can, who Madame Corneuil is—whom, however, I have never seen; but I am well acquainted with those who do know her.

“Can it be possible, dear Mathilde, that you have never heard of Madame Corneuil before now? I am sorry; it proves you are no literary woman; in fact, you must be a woman who actually never reads even the *Gazette des Tribunaux*. Do not fancy from this sentence that Madame Corneuil is either a poisoner or a receiver of stolen goods, or that she has ever even appeared before the Court of Assizes; but some seven or eight years ago she separated from Monsieur Corneuil, and the affair created considerable talk. Here is the whole story, as well as I can remember it:

“Monsieur Corneuil was formerly French Consul-General at Alexandria. He was considered a good agent, whose only fault was that his manner was rather brusque. That is a slight failing. In the country of the ‘Koorbash,’ one must know how to be brusque with both men and things. When an Oriental is not of your opinion, and sets too high a price upon his own, the only way to convince him is to strangle him; but this has nothing to do with my subject. A chance, fortunate for some and unfortunate for others, led one Monsieur Vêretz to land on the quays of Alexandria. He was a small business agent in Paris, who, not succeeding there, in order to escape from his creditors, came as fast as his legs would bring him to seek his fortune in the land of the Pharaohs. He was, it seems, an insignificant fellow of doubtful morality, and of more than equivocal reputation. Monsieur Vêretz had a daughter, eighteen years old, who was bewitchingly pretty. How and where Monsieur Corneuil

made her acquaintance, history does not say ; it merely relates that this bear was very susceptible, and was determined to follow his own fancies. On first meeting with this beautiful child, he fell desperately in love with her. Fortunately for Mademoiselle Hortense V éretz, her mother was an excellent manager—a most fortunate thing for a daughter. After a few weeks of vain endeavour, Monsieur Corneuil was determined to overcome all obstacles. The Consul-General, who had a large fortune, persisted in marrying, for the sake of her beautiful eyes, a girl who possessed nothing, and whose father bore a blemished name ; still more, he married her without any contract at all, thereby giving her an equal share in his property. The matter caused great scandal. People flung his father-in-law at him, and openly brought insinuations against himself as well, so that he was at last obliged to give in his resignation, and left Egypt to return to Périgueux, his native town, in which step his beautiful young wife encouraged him, for she longed to break away for ever from a father by whom she was so much compromised, and also to enjoy her new fortune in France. I remember hearing the whole story at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, where they talked of it for a week, and then forgot it for something else. But the ex-Consul's troubles were not ended. Four years later, Madame Corneuil demanded a separation. Her mother had accompanied her to Périgueux : when one is fortunate enough to have a manœuvring mother, it is best never to part with her, and to be guided always by her counsel.

“ Why did Madame Corneuil separate from her husband ? You must ask the lawyers. They were admirable on either side, and used all the resources of their eloquence. The pleading on both sides where epigram alternated with apostrophe, and apostrophe with invective, was a specimen of that elevated taste which delights the malice of the public.

“The details escape me. I have not the *Gazette des Tribunaux* at hand, but it does not matter—I am sure of my facts. Papin, the plaintiff’s counsel, one of the first at the bar, protested that Monsieur Corneuil was an ugly fellow, a downright blockhead; that Madame Corneuil was of a most exquisite nature, an angelic character; that this monster was at first desperately in love with this angel, but soon tired of her, and abused her in every way—to all of which Virion, the counsel for the defendant, insisted that, if his client had occasionally been somewhat hasty in his manner towards her, he was no monster, and that the sweet heart of this angel contained a considerable amount of vinegar and a great deal of calculation. He tried to prove to the court that there was every excuse for Monsieur Corneuil’s behaviour, but that his wife looked upon his determination to live in Périgueux as a crime, for she could not endure the place; and, since she could not persuade him to change their abode to Paris, which she considered the only spot worthy of her grace and her genius, she had determined to devise a plan to regain her independence, and for that end had applied herself with Machiavellian ingenuity to aggravate him; that she had made his home unbearable by the sharpness of her wit, by every kind of petty persecution, by all those pin-prickings of which angels alone have the secret, and which drive to distraction even men who are not monsters! Was the unfortunate man to blame for now and then asserting himself? I assure you again that both lawyers did wonderfully well. The great difficulty was to know which was the liar. For myself, I should have dismissed both. However, the court sided with Papin. The separation was granted, and half the fortune adjudged to Madame Corneuil. It seemed, however, that Virion was not entirely wrong, for six months after the verdict Madame Corneuil left for Paris in company with her mother.

“I know beforehand, my dear Mathilde, that you will ask me what became of the beautiful Madame Corneuil in Paris. I have been out three times this morning for the express purpose of finding out—you need not thank me, for I like it. Madame Corneuil has not yet satisfied her secret ambition ; she cannot yet say, ‘I have reached it!’ but she is fairly on her way thither. The butterfly has not entirely emerged from the chrysalis ; but she is patient, and one day will spread her wings and fly in triumph from her sheath. Madame Corneuil gives receptions and dinner-parties, and holds a *salon*. A beautiful woman with a manœuvring mother and a good cook, need not fear being left to pine in solitude. Formerly there were to be seen at her house a great many literary men, especially those of the new school—the young men. Great good may it do them. There are among them men of talent with a future before them, but there are also some among them whose novelties are not new, and whose youth is somewhat rank ; but that is no business of mine. It does not prevent them from dining at Madame Corneuil’s. She is not merely contented with encouraging literature, she also manufactures it, and employs the young men around her to write little paragraphs for the lesser journals in praise of her. Grateful stomachs make most excellent heralds, and at all events she is rich enough to pay for her own fame.

“Eighteen months after her establishment in Paris she published a romance, which by the merest accident fell into my hands. I confess I did not read it through to the end ; every variety of courage cannot be looked for in one individual. It began with the description of a mist. At the end of ten pages—heaven be praised !—the fog lifted, and a woman in an open carriage was visible. I remember that the carriage was bought of Binder ; I remember also that the woman, whose heart was an abyss, wore six and a quarter in gloves,

that she had three freckles on her right temple—just so many, and no more—‘quivering nostrils, arms inimitably rounded, and breathless silences.’ I do not know if we are of the same opinion, but descriptions appal me, and I make my escape. Besides, my mind is so poorly constructed that I cannot see this woman whom the author has taken such pains to describe. Good Homer, who did not belong to the new school, was satisfied to tell me merely that Achilles was fair, and yet I can see him before me. But what is to be done? It is the fashion of our day; they call it studying—what is the word?—studying the documents of humanity, and it seems no one ever thought of that till now, not even my old friend Fielding, whom I reread every year. I am not very fond of even serious pedants, but I have a holy horror of pedantry when applied to the merest trifles. As I am no longer young, I agree with Voltaire, who did not like to find subjects seriously discussed which were not even worthy of being touched upon. Madame Corneuil’s romance, I regret to say, fell flat. She strove to recover herself by poetry, and published a volume of sonnets, in which there was no allusion whatever to Monsieur Corneuil. The verses were written with a rapid pen, but a pen cut by an angel, and full of the most exquisitely sweet and refined sentiments. As a general rule, the sonnets of wives separated from their husbands are sublime. Unfortunately, there is not a great call for the sublime. It was a cruel disappointment to Madame Corneuil, who suddenly broke with her muse.

“All great artists, Mozart as well as Talleyrand, Rafaele as well as Bismarck, have their different phases. Madame Corneuil thought she had better change hers: she reformed the whole style of her house, her cooking, her furniture, and her dress. She turned to serious things, and suddenly assumed a taste for neutral tints and sober conversations, for metaphysics and *feuille-morte* ribbons. This beautiful blonde

discovered that she was not seen to full advantage unless in mezzo-tinto relief in a room full of grave people. She undertook to weed out her company, and gently closed her doors on nearly all her dandies, at any rate upon the louder sort, who hover about green-rooms and tell coarse stories. She grew disgusted with gossip, and found that respect was more desirable, even at the price of a little *ennui*. She endeavoured, henceforth, to gather around her men of position and women of high character. It was difficult, but, with some pains and a great deal of perseverance, an ambitious woman who can stand being bored may accomplish anything. She wrote no more sonnets or romances, but rushed full tilt into works of charity.

“Charity, my dear Mathilde, is at the same time, and according to circumstances, the most beautiful of all virtues or the most useful of occupations. You have your poor, and God alone knows how much you love them, how you care for them and cherish them; but your left hand will never know what your right hand doeth. I do not know if Madame Corneuil has often seen any poor people; but, by way of compensation, she goes and comes, and agitates and schemes, and preaches. She is on six committees and twelve sub-committees; she is an incomparable beggar, a very expert cashier, an experienced treasurer, and accomplished vice-president. Yes, my dear, they say no one can preside better than she. It is the very best way to push one’s self into society. I must add that, although she composes poetry no longer, she has not given up prose. She has written an eloquent treatise on ‘The Apostleship of Woman,’ which is sold for the benefit of a new hospital, and has reached its fifth edition. The sonnets were sublime, but the treatise is more than sublime. It is a mixture of the tenderness of Saint François de Sales and the spirituality of Saint Theresa. Never has the sugar-plum been held so high out of the reach

of our poor humanity—it is not even in the air which we can breathe, but in pure ether. I am curious to know what Monsieur Corneuil and Périgueux think of it. The young fellow who furnished me with all these details spoke in rather a satirical manner; I asked him why, and he continued: ‘That few really knew her well. My opinion,’ he said, ‘is, that she is a cool, calculating woman; that she is determined to have a position, and to satisfy her ambition by fair means or foul. She aspires to become a leader, to have a hand in politics, and her dream is to marry some great name, or else a deputy.’ The young fellow said all this with a little bitterness. I learned that for nearly a year he has neither dined nor set foot in Madame Corneuil’s house. Montesquieu used to say, ‘Father Tournemine and I have quarrelled, so when we talk of one another you must believe neither.’ Thus I only believe half of what the young man says.

“This is all the information I can give you, my dear Mathilde; tell me what you want with it? Your old uncle embraces you tenderly.

“P.S.—I open my letter to say that as I was going to put it in the box on my way to dinner, by the grace of heaven I came upon the lawyer Papin at the corner of the Rue Choiseul. It was his eloquence that gained the case for the amiable lady whom you seem, heaven knows why, to have taken a grudge against. I asked him for still further information. Madame Corneuil has changed her style again, and I begin to think she changes too often. I am afraid she has not that concentrated mind or that persistence which is necessary for great enterprises. I have my doubts of these impulsive creatures who proceed by fits and starts. At my very first words, Papin bridled up and straightened himself, after the manner of lawyers, as if he bore the weight of the universe on his shoulders, and broadened them lest it should

fall. He exclaimed, as if he were apostrophising a judge : ‘Monsieur le Marquis, that woman is simply a marvel of Christian virtue. She heard eighteen months ago that her husband had a dangerous attack of the lungs. What did she do ? Forgetting her own wrongs and her justifiable resentment, she rushed to him in Périgueux, and has become reconciled to him. Monsieur Corneuil was advised to go to Egypt ; she left everything to accompany him, to become the nurse of a brute whose harshness had endangered her own life. Was I not right in affirming in court that Madame Corneuil was an angel ?’ ‘There is no need of getting excited,’ said I to him ; ‘I admire her fine character as well as you, but might it not be that, after having obtained, thanks to you, half the fortune, this angel proposes to secure the other half as her inheritance ?’

“He made a gesture of indignation, straightened himself again—‘Ah ! Monsieur le Marquis,’ answered he, ‘you never believed in women ; you are a horrible sceptic.’ I looked at him, he looked at me ; I laughed, and he began to laugh. I think we must have resembled Cicero’s augurs.

“The good of it all, my dear Mathilde, is, that you have no further need of explaining yourself to me. Listen. This is just what has happened : Your son Horace, an Egyptologist of great promise, who does me the honour of being my great-nephew, has been in Egypt for two years. There he has met a lovely blonde, and for the first time his heart has spoken ; he could not keep from writing to you about it, hence his letters are filled with Madame Corneuil, and your maternal anxiety is aroused. Am I not right ? For shame ! you are ungrateful towards Providence. You have reproached your son a thousand times with being too sober, too serious, too much given to study ; scorning society, women, gaiety, and business ; cherishing no other dream but that of some day composing a large book which will reveal to the aston-

ished universe the ancient secrets of four thousand years. You flattered yourself that you might see him either in the Chamber of Deputies, the Council of State, or the diplomatic service : his refusal made you wretched. From his earliest infancy he cried to be taken to the Egyptian Museum at the Louvre, and could have told you with his eyes closed what was in Cabinet K, and Case Q, in the room of sacred antiquities. It is no fault of mine. I did not make him. This truly extraordinary youth never loved any one but the goddess Isis, wife of Osiris. He was never interested in any events but such as took place under Sesostris the Great. The most heated discussions of our deputies and the most eloquent words they might utter always seemed tame to him in comparison with the story of the Pharaohs. He liked, better than any amusement you could offer him, a papyrus mounted on linen or pasteboard, a mummy's mask, a hawk, symbol of the soul, or a pretty gold *scarabæus*, emblem of immortality.

"I speak knowingly, for he honoured me with his confidence. I shall not easily forget the last time I saw him : I found him shut up with a hieroglyphic inscription arranged backward in columns, and ornamented with drawings of faces. He seemed much annoyed at being interrupted in this enchanting *tête-à-tête*. At the head of the manuscript was a man with a yellow face, hair painted blue, and his forehead ornamented with a lotus-bud and a great white cone. I touched one of the columns and said to the dear child, 'Great decipherer, what may this conundrum mean?' He answered, without taking offence : 'My dear uncle, this conundrum, which, by your leave, is very plain, is of the greatest importance, and signifies that the keeper of the flocks of Ammon, Amen-Heb, the ever-truthful, and his wife, who loves him, Amen-Apt, the ever-truthful, render homage to Osiris, dwelling in the land of the West, ruler of times and seasons, to

Ptah-Sokari, ruler of the tomb, and to the great Tum, who made the heavens and created all the essences coming out of the earth.' I listened to him with so much interest that the next day he thought to confer a great favour upon me by sending me the entire history of Amen-Heb, written out. I read it once every year, on his birthday. Can any one accuse me of neglecting my duty as a great-uncle?

"Do not deny, my dear, that this mania made you desperate. Then why do you complain? Your son is half saved already. Heaven has sent Madame Corneuil to him. She will teach him a great many things of which he is ignorant, and lead him to unlearn a great deal else. In her beautiful eyes he will forget Amenophis III. of the eighteenth dynasty, Amen-Apt the ever-truthful, and the man with the great white cone. Do not grudge him his tardy enjoyment, to say nothing about charity towards a sick man's nurse. Everything is going on well, my dear Mathilde. Write me word that, on further reflection, you agree with me."

The next day but one, the Marquis de Miraval received the following short reply from his niece :

"My dear Uncle,—Your letter and the information you have been so kind as to gather for me have only doubled my anxiety. Madame Corneuil is an intriguer. Why must Horace be caught in her toils? Since I lost my husband, you have been my only counsellor and my first resort. Never did I need your assistance more. It is cruel to tear you away from your dear Paris, but I know your kind feelings on my behalf, your care for the interests of our family, and your almost fatherly love for my poor, silly Horace. I implore you to come to Vichy, that we may consult together. I summon you, and shall expect you."

Madame de Penneville was right in thinking it would be

hard for her uncle to leave Paris ; since he had given up diplomacy, he could not endure any other spot. In the hottest months of summer, when every one goes away, he never dreamed of leaving. He preferred to the most beautiful pine-trees, the tiny-leaved elms, which he saw from the terrace of his club, where he spent the greater part of his days and even of his nights. Nevertheless, this egotist or philosopher always had at heart the interests of his nephew, whom he intended to make his heir ; and, besides, he was very curious about it all, and did not conceal it. With a sigh he ordered his valet to pack his trunks, and that very evening left for Vichy.

Informed by telegraph of his intention, Madame de Penneville was waiting for him at the station. She rushed towards him as soon as he appeared, saying : “ Fancy—that woman is a widow, and he really means to marry her ! ”

“ Poor mother ! ” exclaimed the marquis. “ I agree with you, that things are getting serious.”

II.

MONSIEUR DE MIRAVAL was not mistaken in his surmises ; things had gone on much as he had imagined. Count Horace de Penneville had made the acquaintance of a beautiful blonde at Cairo, and, for the first time, his heart was touched. They met at the New Hotel ; from the very first Madame Corneuil took pains to attract the attention and thoughts of the young man. Monsieur Corneuil seemed to rally somewhat, and they profited by his improvement to visit together the museum at Boulak, the subterranean ruins of the Serapeum, the pyramids of Gizeh and of Sakkarah. Horace took upon himself the office of cicerone in good earnest, and made it both his business and pleasure to ex-

plain Egypt to Madame Corneuil, and Madame Corneuil listened to all his explanations with great seriousness and interested attention, occasionally mingled with a mild ecstasy. She seemed rapt and intent, a dull flame glowed in the depths of her eyes; she possessed in perfection the art of listening with them. She found no difficulty in admitting that Moses lived in the reign of Rameses II.; she seemed delighted to learn that the second dynasty lasted three hundred years; that Menes was a native of Thinis; and that the great pyramid was built gradually by Ka-kau, the Kaiechôs of Manetho, by whom was founded the worship of the ox Apis, the living manifestation of the god Ptah. She felt all the enthusiasm of a novice initiated into the sacred mysteries of Egyptian chronology, declared that it was the most delightful of all sciences and the most charming of pastimes, and vowed that she would learn to read hieroglyphics.

The *dénoûment* took place during a visit to the tomb of Ti, by the reddish glare of torches. They were examining in a sort of ecstasy the pictures graven on the walls of each of the funereal chambers. One of them represented a hunter seated in a bark in the midst of a marsh, in which hippopotami and crocodiles were swimming. As they were bending over the crocodiles, Madame Corneuil, absorbed in her reverie, grew more than usually expansive. The young man was touched with a totally new sensation. She left the tomb first. On joining her without, he became dazzled, and suddenly discovered that she had the bearing of a queen, hazel eyes, and the most wonderful hair in the world, that she was beautiful as a dream, and that he was wildly in love with her.

A few weeks later, Monsieur Corneuil departed this life, leaving his entire fortune to his wife, who, to speak the truth, had nursed him with heroic patience. The evening before her embarkation with a leaden coffin for Périgueux, Horace

begged the favour of a moment's interview by night under the starry skies of Egypt, in a delicious atmosphere, wherein flitted the great vague ghosts of the Pharaohs : he then confessed his passion to her, and strove to make her engage herself to him before the year was over. Then did he still further learn all the delicacy of her refined soul. She reproached him with downcast eyes for the eagerness of his love, and said that she could not think of thus mingling the rose and cypress, and thoughts of love with long crape veils. But she would permit him to write to her, and promised to reply in six months. On parting, she gave him a demure smile of encouragement.

He then ascended the Nile again, reached Upper Egypt, glad to pass his months of waiting in the solitude of the Thebaid, where the days are more than twenty-four hours in length ; they could not be too long for him to decipher hieroglyphics while thinking of Madame Corneuil. Crocodiles will play a conspicuous part in this story : Horace was at Keri, or Crocodilopolis, when he received an exquisitely written and perfumed note, telling him that the adored being was passing the summer with her mother on the borders of Lake Lemane, in a *pension* not far from Lausanne, and that, if Count de Penneville should make his appearance, he need not knock twice for the door to open. He left like an arrow, and went straight to Lausanne. He had written a letter of twelve pages to Madame de Penneville, in which he told her of his good fortune with such effusion of tenderness and of joy as might well have made her despair.

Both uncle and niece spent all their evening in talking, deliberating, and discussing, as generally happens in like cases. The same things were repeated twenty times ; it is no help, but a great comfort. Monsieur de Miraval, who seldom took things tragically, set himself to console the countess ; but she was inconsolable.

"How, in good faith," said she, "could you expect me coolly to contemplate the prospect of having for a daughter-in-law a girl sprung from no one knows where ; the daughter of a man of ruined reputation, who married an insignificant man, and separated from him that she might have her own way in Paris ; a woman whose name has been dragged through the *Gazette des Tribunaux*; a woman who writes descriptions of mists, who composes sonnets, and who, I am sure, is far from scrupulous?"

"I do not know about that," answered the marquis, "but it has been said long ago that the most dangerous creatures in the world are the women '*à sonnets*,' and the serpents '*à sonnettes*.' I will wager, however, that this woman is a manœuvrer, and that it is a very disagreeable business."

"Horace, wretched Horace!" exclaimed the countess, "what grief you cause me!—The dear fellow has a most noble and generous heart ; unfortunately, he never had any common sense ; but how could I expect this?"

"Alas! you had every reason to expect just this," interrupted the marquis. "Such precocious wisdom cannot be sufficiently mistrusted ; it always ends in some calamity. I have told you a hundred times, my dear Mathilde, that your son gave me considerable uneasiness, and that some unfortunate surprise was preparing for us. We are all born with a certain amount of nonsense in us, which we must get rid of ; happy are those who exhaust it in youth ! Horace kept it all till he was twenty-eight years old, capital and interest, and this is the result of his economy. Many little follies save from greater ones ; when a man only commits one, it is almost always enormous, and generally irreparable."

Madame de Penneville handed the marquis a cup of tea, sweetened by her white hand, and said to him in most caressing tones : "My dear uncle, you alone can save us."

"In what way?" asked he.

"Horace has so much regard, so much respect for you. You have always had so much authority over him."

"Bah! we no longer live under the *régime* of authority."

"But, then, you have always allowed him to look upon himself as your heir; that gives you a certain right, it seems to me."

"Come, now! Young men who live in the clouds, like your son, can easily give up an inheritance. What is an income of a hundred thousand francs compared with a pretty scarabæus, the emblem of immortality?"

"My dear, dear uncle, I am persuaded that, if you would consent to go to Lausanne—"

The marquis jumped from his seat. "Good heavens!" said he. "Lausanne is a long way off." And he heaved a sigh, as his thoughts turned to the terrace at his club.

"Only accept this task, and I will be eternally grateful. You can make the boy listen to reason."

"My dear Mathilde, once in a while I read over my Latin poets. I know one of them says that madness is allied to love, and that to talk reason to a lover is as absurd as to ask him to rave with moderation, '*ut cum ratione insaniat.*'"

"Horace has a heart. You must represent to him that this marriage will drive me to despair."

"He suspects as much, my dear, since he did not dare to come and greet you on his arrival from Egypt, and you may be sure he will not come until you give your consent. A man loves and respects his mother in vain when he is really on fire, and Horace is certainly that. Heavens! his letter proves it. So feverish is the prose that it almost burns the paper."

Madame de Penneville drew near the marquis, tenderly stroking his white hair, and putting her arms about his neck, said: "You are so shrewd: you have so much tact. I have been told that very difficult missions were intrusted

to you in the past, and that you acquitted yourself gloriously."

"O thou cunning one, it is far easier to negotiate with a government than to treat with a lover in the toils of a manœuvrer."

"You can never make me believe that anything is impossible to you."

"You are resolved to draw me in," said he to her. "Well, so be it; the enterprise deserves to be attempted. But have you replied yet to the formidable letter which you have just read to me?"

"I would do nothing without consulting you."

"So much the better; nothing is compromised; the affair is as yet intact. I will let you know to-morrow if I decide to go to Lausanne."

The countess thanked Monsieur de Miraval warmly. She thanked him still more warmly the next day when he announced to her that he would do as she wished, and asked her to take him to the station. She accompanied him, for fear he might repent, and said to him on the way: "This is a journey for all mothers to glory over; but, will you be kind enough to write to me often from there?"

"Oh, certainly," answered he, "but only upon one condition."

"What may that be?"

"That you do not believe one single word that I write to you."

"What do you mean?"

"I must also request you," continued he, "to answer me as if you really did believe me, and to send my letters to Horace, begging him to keep them to himself."

"I understand you less and less."

"What can be beyond the comprehension of a woman? Open letters are the depths of diplomacy. After all, it is

not necessary that you should understand ; the essential thing is that you obey my instructions scrupulously. Good-bye, my dear ; I am going to where heaven and your purrings have sent me. If I do not succeed, it will prove that our friends the Republicans were quite right in shelving me."

Having thus spoken, he kissed his niece, and stepped into the railway-carriage. He reached Lausanne twenty-four hours later. The first thing which he did after engaging a room at the Hôtel Gibbon was to supply himself with a complete fishing-outfit. After that, tired with his journey, he slept six hours. Upon waking, he dined ; after dining, he took a carriage to the "Pension Vallaud," situated twenty minutes' walk from Lausanne, upon the brow of one of the most beautiful hills in the world. This charming villa, recently converted into an hotel, consisted of a large house in which the Count de Penneville had an apartment, and a lovely detached chalet which was occupied by Madame Corneuil and her mother. The chalet and the house were separated, or, if it sounds better, united by a large and shady park, which Horace crossed many times a day, saying to himself, "When shall we live under the same roof?" But people have to learn how to wait for happiness.

At that very moment Horace was working, pen in hand, at his great "History of the Hyksos, or Shepherd Kings, or the Unclean"—that is to say, of those terrible Canaanitish hordes who, two thousand years before the Christian era, disturbed in their camps by the Elamite invasions of the Kings Chodor-nakhounta and Chodormabog, swept in their turn over the valley of the Nile, set it on fire, and drenched it in blood, and for more than five centuries occupied both the centre and the north of Egypt. Full of learning, and rich in fresh documents collected by him with very great pains, he undertook to show on unquestionable testimony that the Pharaoh under whom Joseph became minister was indeed Apophis or

Apepi, King of the Hyksos, and he flattered himself that he could prove it so clearly that henceforth it would be impossible for the most critical minds to contradict it. A few months previously he had sent the first chapters of his history from Cairo to Paris, and they were read at the Institute. His thesis shocked one or two Egyptologists, others thought there was some reason in it, while one of them wrote to him thus, "Your *début* is promising. *Macte animo generose puer.*"

Wrapped in a sort of burnous of white woollen stuff, his neck bare, and his hair disordered, he was leaning over a round table, before a writing-desk surmounted by a sphinx. His face wore the expression of a contented mind and a perfectly serene conscience. On the table a beautiful purple rose, almost black, was unfolding its petals; he had put it into a glass, into which a blue porcelain statuette, representing an Egyptian goddess with a cat's face, plunged her impertinent nose into the water without unbending her brow. Horace seemed by turns contemplating this very nose and also the flower which Madame Corneuil had gathered for him less than an hour before; at times also, turning his eye towards the large open window, he saw that the moon, at its full, cast along the shimmering waters of the lake a long train of silver spangles. But, by a fortunate condition of things, he was also wholly absorbed in his work; he was not in the least distracted from it; he belonged to the Hyksos. The moon, the rose, Madame Corneuil, the cat-headed divinity, the sphinx on the writing-desk, the Unclean, and King Apepi—were all blended together and become one in his inmost thoughts. The blessed in paradise see all in God, and can thus think of all things without losing for one moment their great idea, which is infinite. Count Horace was at the same moment at Lausanne in the neighbourhood of the woman whose image was never out of his mind, and in

Egypt two thousand years before Christ, and his happiness was as complete as his application to his studies.

He had just finished this phrase: "Consider the sculptures of the period of the Shepherd kings; examine carefully and impartially their angular faces, with their prominent cheek-bones; and, if you are unprejudiced, you will agree that the race to which the Hyksos belong could not have been purely Semitic, but must have been strongly mixed with the Turanian element."

Satisfied with this ending, he stopped for a second, laid down his pen, and, drawing the purple rose nearer to him, pressed it to his lips. Hearing a knock at the door, he quickly returned the rose to its vase, and in a tone of vexation exclaimed, "Come in!" The door opened. Monsieur de Miraval entered. Horace's face grew dark; the unexpected apparition dismayed him; he felt as if he had been suddenly shut out of his paradise. Alas! the happiest of lives is only an intermittent paradise!

The marquis, standing on the threshold, bowed gravely to his nephew, saying: "What! am I disturbing you? You never knew how to conceal your feelings."

"My dear uncle," answered he, "how can you think such a thing? I was not expecting you, that I must confess. But pray, what has brought you here?"

"I am travelling in Switzerland. Could I pass through Lausanne without coming to see you?"

"Confess, uncle, that you were not passing through," answered Horace; "own that you are more than a passer-by—that you came here on purpose."

"You are right, I did come on purpose, my boy," answered Monsieur de Miraval.

"Then I have the honour of dealing with an ambassador?"

"Yes, an ambassador, most strict in etiquette, who insists

upon being received with all the respect due to him, and according to the rules securing the rights of men in his position."

Horace had recovered from his vexation; he had recourse to philosophy, and put a good face on a bad business. Offering a chair to the marquis, he said: "Be seated, my lord ambassador, in the very best of my easy-chairs. But, to begin with, let us embrace one another, my dear uncle. If I am not mistaken, it is fully two years since we have had the pleasure of seeing one another. What can I offer to entertain you? I think I remember that iced champagne used to be your favourite drink. Do not think you are in a barbarous country; anything one wishes is to be had; you shall be gratified at once."

With these words he pulled a bell, and a servant appeared. He gave him his orders, which were immediately carried out, although slowly. Nevertheless, Monsieur de Miraval looked at his nephew with a satisfaction mingled with secret vexation. It seemed to him that the handsome fellow had grown still handsomer. His short beard was beautifully black; his features, formerly rather weak, had gained strength, firmness, and emphasis; his grayish-blue eyes had grown larger, his complexion was sunburnt and tanned to a tint which became him greatly; his smile full of sweetness and mystery, was charming—it was like that undefinable smile which the Egyptian sculptors, whose genius Greece could hardly surpass, carved upon the lips of their statues. The sphinxes in the Louvre would have recognised Horace from his family resemblance, and have claimed him as a relation. It is easy to acquire the complexion of the country in which one is living, and a face often grows to resemble the thing one most loves.

"Fool of fools!" thought the marquis angrily; "you have the proudest bearing, the finest head in the world, and

you do not know how to put them to a better use. Ah ! if at your age I had had such eyes and such a smile, what would I not have done with them ! No woman could have resisted me ; but you—what can you say for yourself when Providence calls you to account for all the gifts he has bestowed upon you ? You will have to say, ‘I profited by them to marry Madame Corneuil.’ Ah ! ‘you fool !’ will be the answer, ‘you foolishly began where others ended.’”

Horace was far from guessing Monsieur de Miraval’s secret thoughts. After the disagreeable emotion of the first meeting was over, his natural feeling returned, which was that of pleasure at again seeing his uncle, for he loved him well. In truth, it was in his capacity of ambassador that he disliked him, and he resolved not to spare him, for, when the will is fixed, objections are less apt to be dreaded, for one knows beforehand how they may all be answered. So he awaited the advance of the enemy with firm step, and, as the enemy was drinking champagne, and evidently in no hurry to commence hostilities, he marched up to meet him.

“First, dear uncle,” said he to him, “give me whatever news you can of my mother at once.”

“I wish I had something good to tell you about her,” answered the marquis. “But you know we are anxious about her health, and you must be aware that the letter which she received from you—”

“Did my letter trouble her ?”

“Could you doubt it ?”

“I love my mother dearly,” answered Horace quickly, “but I have always considered her to be a most reasonable woman. Evidently I did not go to work aright ; I will send her another letter to-morrow, and try to reconcile her to my happiness.”

“If you think as I do, you will not write again ; one evil never undoes another. Your mother assuredly wishes you

to be happy, but the extravagant proposition which you confided to her—does the word ‘extravagant’ hurt you? I withdraw it; I meant to say the somewhat singular—well, I withdraw the word ‘singular’ also. But it is often used in that sense in the Chamber of Deputies, and you must not hold yourself higher than a deputy. Well then, this proposition, which is neither extravagant nor singular, disturbs your mother greatly, and you will not be able to overcome her objections to it.”

“Has she authorised you to make them known to me?”

“Must I, then, present my credentials?”

“That is quite unnecessary, uncle. Say frankly whatever you please—or rather, if you are fortified by good arguments say nothing at all, for I warn you that you will spend all your eloquence for naught, and I know you never care to waste your words.”

“But you may as well resign yourself to listen to me. You cannot suppose that I have come a hundred leagues at full gallop for nothing. My speech is ready, and you must submit to it.”

“Till morning dawns, if needs be,” answered Horace; “the night shall be devoted to you.”

“Thanks. And now let us begin at the beginning. That which has just taken place has not only grieved me much, but cruelly humiliated me. I flattered myself that I understood human nature somewhat, and was quite proud of my knowledge. Now, I must confess, to my own confusion, that I am entirely mistaken in you. What, my son! can it be that you—whom I considered the most sensible, serious, sober fellow in the world—can think of thus suddenly striking dismay into the bosom of your family by a determination—”

“Extravagant and singular,” interrupted Horace.

“I said I would withdraw both of those words; but, I ask you, does not this project of marriage seem a headstrong thing?”

"Must I answer your proposition by proposition?" exclaimed he, "or would you rather give me your whole speech in one breath?"

"No, that would tire me too much. Answer as I go along."

"Well, dear uncle, let me tell you that you are not at all mistaken in your ideas of me, and that this headstrong act is the most sensible and prudent thing with which my good genius ever inspired me—an act which both my heart and reason approve."

"Then you forbid my surprise that the heir to a good name and large fortune, a Count de Penneville, who could choose in his own rank, among fifty young girls really worthy of him, refuses every one whom his mother proposes, and suddenly changes his mind to marry—whom? A—madame—what is her name, Horace? I never can remember the name."

"Her name is Madame Corneuil, at your service," answered Horace in a piqued tone. "I am sorry if her name displeases you, but spare yourself the trouble of fixing it in your memory. Two months hence you can call her Countess Hortense de Penneville."

"The deuce! how fast you go! But it is not yet settled."

"We have exchanged vows, uncle. You may as well consider it so, for I defy you to undo it."

Monsieur de Miraval filled and emptied his glass anew, then began again. "Do not get excited, or lose your temper. I would not offend you for anything, but I am so astonished, so surprised. Tell me, what is that blue porcelain statuette, with a halo round her head, with such a slender figure, and the face of a cat, holding a queer sort of guitar in her right hand?"

"That is no guitar, uncle: it is a sistrum, a symbol of the harmony of the universe. Do you not recognise the statu-

ette to be that of the goddess Sekhet, the Bubastis of the Greek authors, whom they call the great lover of Ptah, a divinity by turns beneficent and revengeful, who, according to all appearance, represents the solar radiation in its two-fold office ?”

“ I beg a thousand pardons, I believe I do remember her, and that rose which she seems to smell at somewhat suspiciously—ah ! I think I need not ask whence that rose comes.”

“ Well, yes ! it was given me by the woman whose name you cannot possibly remember.”

“ But, excuse me—I do know the name quite well—Madame Corneuil—is it not Corneuil ? My gentle friend, does it not seem to you that the goddess Sekhet or Bubastis, who represents the solar radiation, fastens her angry glances blazing with indignation upon that purple rose, and curses the rival whom you insolently prefer to her ? Take care—roses fade ; both roses and their donors live only for a day, while the goddesses are immortal and their anger also.”

“ Reassure yourself, uncle,” answered Horace with a smile. “ The goddess Sekhet looks with gentle eyes upon that flower. If you should ask her, she would say : ‘ The fifty heiresses whom you have proposed for Count de Penneville are all or nearly all but foolish creatures, with narrow and frivolous minds, caring only for gewgaws and trifles ; therefore I approve him decidedly for having disdained these dolls, and for wishing to marry a woman who has few equals, whose intelligence is as remarkable as her heart is loving ; a woman who adores Egypt and who longs to return thither ; a woman who will not only be the sweetest companion to your nephew, but will also be passionately interested in his labours, will aid him by her counsel, and be the confidante of all his thoughts.’ ”

“ And will deserve to become a member of the Institute like him,” interrupted Monsieur de Miraval. “ How charm-

ing it will be to see you enter it arm-in-arm! Horace, I abandon all idea of treating you to the end of my speech. Only permit me to ask you a question or two. Where did this incomprehensible accident take place? Oh! I remember—your mother told me that it was in a grotto at Memphis.”

“My mother was not very prudent,” answered Horace; “but let that pass! It was in the depths of a grotto. We call it a hypogeum.”

“Confound the hypogeum! My ideas are getting confused. I remember it was in the tomb of King Ti.”

“Ti was not a king, uncle,” answered Horace in a tone of mild indulgence. “Ti was one of the great feudal lords, one of the barons of some ruler of the fourth dynasty, which held sway for two hundred and eighty-four years, or perhaps of the fifth, which was also Memphite.”

“Heaven keep me from denying it! So you were in the tomb? Inspired by love, Madame Corneuil fluently deciphered a hieroglyphic inscription, and, touched by the beautiful miracle, you fell at her feet.”

“Such miracles do not come to pass, uncle. Madame Corneuil does not yet know how to read hieroglyphics, but she will read them some day.”

“And is that why you love her, unhappy youth?”

“I love her,” exclaimed Horace ardently, “because she is wonderfully beautiful, because she is adorable, because she has every grace, and beside her every other woman seems ugly. Yes, I love her—I have given her my heart and my life for ever! So much the worse for those who do not understand me.”

“So it may be,” answered the uncle; “but your mother has made inquiries, and evil tongues say that—”

“Enough!” replied Horace, raising his voice. “If any one but you ventured to make such inuendos against a woman for whom my respect equals my love, a woman worthy of all esteem, he should either have my life or I his!”

“You know that I could not have the slightest desire to fight with my only heir—what would become of the property? Since you say so, I will be convinced that Madame Corneuil is a person absolutely above reproach. But where in the world did your mother pick up her information? She says plainly that she is an ambitious manœuvrer, and that her dream is—are you really sure that this woman is not one of the cunning ones? Are you very sure that she is sincerely, passionately interested in the exploits of the Pharaohs, and in the god Anubis, guide of souls? Are you sure that the greatest effects are not sometimes produced with slight effort, and that down in the grotto of Ti she might not have been acting a little farce, to which an Egyptologist of my acquaintance has fallen an easy dupe? For my own part, I believe that if this same handsome fellow had a crooked nose, and dull, squinting eyes, Madame Corneuil would like him just as well, for the excellent reason that Madame Corneuil has taken it into her head that some day she will be called ‘Countess de Penneville.’”

“Really, you excite my pity, uncle, and it is very good in me to answer you. To ascribe such miserable calculation, self-interest, and vanity to the proudest, noblest, and purest of souls! You ought to blush that you can so lower yourself. She has told me the story of her life, day by day, hour by hour. Heaven knows she has nothing to conceal! The poor saint was married very young and against her will, through the tyranny of her father, to a man who was not worthy to touch the hem of her garment with the tip of his finger—and yet she forgave him all. If you only knew how tenderly she took care of him in his last moments!”

“But it seems to me, my young friend, that she was well rewarded for her trouble, since he left her his fortune.”

“And to whom should he have left it? Had he not everything to make amends for? No, never did woman suffer

more or was more worthy of happiness. One thing alone sustained her under her heavy weight of grief. She was strongly convinced that some day she might meet with a man capable of understanding her—whose soul might be on a level with her own. ‘Yes,’ she said to me the other evening, ‘I had faith in him. I was sure of his existence, and the first time I saw you I seemed to recognise you, and I said to myself, “May it not be he?”’ Yes, uncle, she and I are one and the same, and it will be the greatest honour of my life. She loves me, I tell you, she loves me—you can do nothing to alter matters; so we might as well end here, if you are willing.”

The marquis passed his hands twice through his white hair, and exclaimed: “I declare, Horace, you are the frankest of innocents, the most ingenuous of lovers.”

“I assure you, uncle, that you are the most obstinate and incurable of unbelievers.”

“Horace, I call this sphinx and the nose of the goddess Sekhet to witness that poetry is the malady of those who know nothing of life.”

“And I, uncle, call to witness the moon yonder, and this purple rose, which looks at you and laughs, that scepticism is the punishment of those who may have abused their life.”

“And I—I swear to you by that which is most sacred, by the great Sesostris himself—”

“O uncle, what a blunder! I know that you should not be blamed for it, for you have hardly studied the history of Egypt, and it is no business of yours, but know that there has never been so exaggerated and even usurped a reputation as that of the man whom you call the great Sesostris, and whose name really was Rameses II. Swear, if you choose, by King Cheops, conqueror of the Bedouins; swear by Menes, who built Memphis; swear by Amenophis III., called Memnon; or, if you like it better, by Snefrou, last

king but one of the third dynasty, who subdued the nomadic tribes of Arabia Petræa ; but know that your great Sesostris was at bottom a very mediocre man, of very slight merit, who carried his vanity so far as to have the names of the sovereigns who preceded him erased from the monuments and substituted his own, which had weight with superficial minds, Diodorus Siculus particularly, thus introducing the most unfortunate mistakes into history. Your Sesostris, good heavens ! has only lived upon one exploit of his youth. Either through address or through luck, he managed to get through an ambushade with life and baggage unharmed. That was the great achievement which he had engraved hundreds and hundreds of times on the walls of all the buildings erected during his reign ; that was his eternal Valmy, his everlasting Jemappes. I ask you what were his conquests ? He managed to capture negroes because he wanted masons, he hunted down men in Soudan, and his only claim to glory was having had one hundred and seventy children, of whom sixty-nine were sons."

"Goodness ! that is no small thing ; but, after all, what conclusion do you draw from that ?"

"I conclude," answered Horace, who had lost sight of the principal topic in this digression—"I conclude that Sesostris—no," replied he, "I conclude that I adore Madame Corneuil, and that before three months are over she shall be my wife."

The marquis rose hastily, exclaiming, "Horace, my heir and great-nephew, come to my arms !"

And as Horace, immovable, looked at him astonished,—
"Must I say it again ? Come to my arms," continued he.
"I am pleased with you. Your passion really makes me young once more. I admire youth, love, and frankness. I thought you only had a fancy for this woman, a whim, but I see your heart is touched, and one cannot do better than listen to the voice of the heart. Forgive my foolish questions

and my impertinent objections. What I said was to acquit my conscience. Your mother gave me my lesson, and I repeated it like a parrot. We must not get angry with these poor mothers ; their scruples are always to be respected."

"Ah, there you touch a tender and sore point," interrupted the young man, "but I know how to win her over—I will write to her to-morrow."

"Let me say one word more—do not write ; your prose has not the power of pleasing her. She has great confidence in me ; my words will have weight. My son, I am quite ready to go over to the enemy if this lovely woman who lives near you is really what you say. I will be your advocate with your mother, and we will make her listen to reason. Will you introduce me to Madame Corneuil ?"

"Are you really sincere, uncle?" asked Horace, looking at him with mistrust and defiance. "Can I depend upon your loyalty?"

"Upon the faith of an uncle and a gentleman!" interrupted the marquis in his turn.

"If that be so, we can embrace this time in good earnest," answered Horace, taking the hand held out to him.

The uncle and nephew stayed talking together for some time longer, like good friends. It was near midnight when Monsieur de Miraval remembered that his carriage was waiting for him in the road to take him back to his hotel. He rose and said to Horace :

"It is settled, then, that you will introduce me to-morrow?"

"Yes, uncle, at two o'clock precisely."

"Is that the hour when you see her?"

"One of my hours. I never work between breakfast and dinner."

"So everything is ruled to order, like music-paper. You are right ; there must be method in all things. Even in love everything must be done by weight, number, and

measure. I knew a philosopher once who said that measure was the best definition of God. But, by the way, I took a nap this afternoon, and am not in the least sleepy. Lend me a book for company when I go to bed. No doubt, you possess Madame Corneuil's writings?"

"Could you doubt that?"

"Don't give me her novel; I have read that already."

"It is a real masterpiece," said Horace.

"There is rather too much fog in it to suit my taste. There is a rumour that she has published sonnets."

"They are real gems," exclaimed he.

"And an essay on the apostleship of woman."

"A wonderful book!" exclaimed he again.

"Lend me the essay and the sonnets. I will read them to-night, that I may be prepared for to-morrow's interview."

Horace began at once to search for the two volumes, which he found with great difficulty. By means of rummaging, he discovered them at last under a great pile of quartos, which were crushing them with their terrible weight. He said to his uncle as he handed them to him: "Keep them as the apple of your eye. For she gave them to me."

"Give yourself no uneasiness; I appreciate the value of the treasure," answered the marquis.

In the same breath he observed that the treatise was only half cut, and the volume of sonnets not cut at all, which gave rise to certain reflections of his own; but he carefully kept them to himself.

III.

THIS world is full of mysterious events, and Hamlet was right in saying that there were more things in heaven and earth than were dreamed of in Horatio's philosophy.

It has been observed that during the time of great wars, when different peoples coming from all parts of a great empire find themselves suddenly brought together in an army to serve in a campaign, strange contagions and fatal epidemics spring up among them, and a great thinker has dared to attribute the cause of it to the forced propinquity of men totally unlike in disposition, in language, and in intellect, who, not having been made to live together, are brought in contact by an evil caprice of destiny. It has also been remarked that, when the crew of the ship which annually brings the necessary provisions for their subsistence to the poor inhabitants of the Shetland Isles land on their shores, they are seized with a spasmodic cough, and do not cease coughing until the ship has again set sail. It is also said that at the approach of a strange vessel the natives of the Faroe Isles are attacked by a catarrhal fever, which it is very difficult to get rid of. Finally, it is stated that sometimes the arrival of a single missionary in one of the South-Sea islands is enough to bring on a dangerous epidemic which will decimate the wretched savages.

This may perhaps explain why, during the night of August 13, 1878, the beautiful Madame Corneuil was greatly disturbed in her sleep, and why on waking the next morning she felt as if her whole body had been bruised. It was not the plague, it was no cholera, no catarrhal fever, no spasmodic cough, but she felt a certain tightness about the head, a disturbance, and a very peculiar nervous irritation: and she had a presentiment that there was danger near, or that an enemy had just landed. Yet she did not know about the Marquis de Miraval, had never even heard of him; she little knew that he was more dangerous than any missionary who ever landed in the islands of the Pacific.

As her mother, who was always the first to enter her chamber to lavish upon her those attentions which she alone

knew how to make agreeable, drew near the bed on tiptoe and wished her good morning, Madame Corneuil, out of humour, gave her a rather cool greeting. Madame Véretz readily perceived that her adored angel was out of sorts. This indulgent mother was somewhat accustomed to her whims. She was made for it, and did not mind. Her daughter was her queen, her divinity, her all ; she devoted herself entirely to her happiness and her glory ; she actually worshipped her with real adoration. She belonged to that race of mothers who are servants and martyrs ; but her servitude pleased her, her martyrdom was sweet to her, and the thin little woman, with the quick eye, and serpentine gait, who, like Cato the Censor, whom she resembled in nothing else, had greenish eyes and red hair, always faced cheerfully the hardships she had to bear.

She had her own consolations. She might be snubbed, scolded, and sent off, but it always ended in her being listened to, since good always resulted from it. It was by her advice that at the propitious moment they had quarrelled with Monsieur Corneuil, and afterwards become reconciled to him. Thanks to her valuable suggestions, they had been able to hold a *salon* in Paris, and to become of some importance there. Madame Corneuil reigned, while really it was Madame Véretz who governed, and it must be said she never had any other end in view but the good fortune of her dear idol. We all have confused ideas of our own which we can hardly unravel, and hidden desires which we dare not confess to ourselves. Madame Véretz had the gift of comprehending her daughter, and reading the inmost recesses of her heart. She undertook to unravel her confused ideas, and to reveal to her her unacknowledged wishes, and took charge of them. That was the secret of her influence, which was considerable. When Madame Corneuil's imagination wandered, her incomparable mother started out as her courier. On reaching the station, the fair traveller found her relays of horses all ready,

and she was under great obligations to her mother for arranging many an agreeable surprise for her. She would have taken great care, moreover, not to embark on any scheme without her courier, whom she might thank for never having allowed her to break down on the way.

After having sent away her mother, and spent half an hour with her maid, Madame Corneuil took a cup of tea, then seated herself at her secretary. She spent her mornings in writing a book, which was to form a sequel to her treatise upon the "Apostleship," to be called "The Position of Woman in Modern Society." To speak plainly, she was merely making the same ideas serve her a second time. Her aim was to show that in democratic society, committed to the worship of the greatest number, the only corrective to coarseness of manners, thought, and interest, would be the sovereignty of woman. "Kings are dying out," she wrote the night before, in a moment of inspiration—"let them go; but we must not let them bear away with them that true kingliness whose benefits are necessary even to republics. Let women sit on the thrones which they leave empty. With them will reign virtue, genius, sublime aspirations, delicacy of heart, disinterested sentiments, noble devotion, and noble scorn." I may have spoiled her phrases, but I think I have given the gist of them. I think, also, that, in the portrait she drew, the superior woman whom she proposed for the worship of human kind bore a surprising resemblance to Madame Corneuil, nor could she imagine her without splendid golden hair twisted around her brow like a diadem.

After a bad night one does not feel inclined for writing. That day Madame Corneuil was not in the mood. The pen felt heavy to the pretty hand, with its taper fingers; both ideas and expression failed her. In vain she twisted a loose curl over her forefinger, in vain did she look at her rosy finger-tips

—nothing came of it ; she began to fancy that a shadow of coming misfortune fell between her and the paper. Heaven knows that in like cases every care was taken to save her nerves, to cause her no interruption, such were the orders. During those hours when she was known to be within her sanctum, the most profound silence reigned everywhere. Madame Véretz saw to that. Every one spoke in a whisper and stepped softly ; and when Jacquot, who did the errands, crossed the paved courtyard, he took great care to remove his sabots, lest he might be heard. This precaution on his part was the result of sad experience. Jacquot played the horn in his leisure moments. One morning when he took the liberty of playing, Madame Véretz coming upon him unawares, gave him a vigorous box on the ear, saying to him : “ Keep still, you little idiot ! don’t you know that she is meditating ? ” Jacquot rubbed his cheek, and took warning. Everybody did the same. So from eight o’clock till noon Jacquot whispered to the cook, and the cook told the coachman, and the coachman told the hens in the yard, who repeated it to the sparrows, who repeated it to the swallows, and to all the winds of heaven, “ Brothers, let us keep silence—she is meditating ! ”

When it struck noon, the door of the sanctuary opened softly, and, as before, Madame Véretz crept in on tiptoe, asking, “ My dear beauty, may I be allowed to enter ? ”

Madame Corneuil scowled with her beautiful eyebrows, and poutingly placed her papers in the most elegant portfolio, and her portfolio in the depths of her rosewood secretary, taking care to remove the key, for fear of robbers.

“ Orders must have been given,” said she, “ not to leave me a moment in peace.”

“ I was obliged to go out this morning,” answered Madame Véretz ; “ did Jacquot happen to take advantage of my absence ? ”

"Jacquot, or some one else, I do not know who ; but they made a great deal of noise, and moved the furniture about. Was it absolutely necessary for you to go out ?"

"Absolutely. You complained yesterday that the fish was not fresh, and that Julia did not understand buying ; so henceforth I shall do my own marketing."

"And during that time, then, there must be a fearful racket."

"What can you do ? Between two evils—"

"No," interrupted Madame Corneuil, "I do not wish you to go yourself and bargain for fish ; why do you not teach Julia how to select it ? You do not know how to give orders, and so it ends in your doing everything yourself."

"I will learn, I will try to improve, my darling," answered Madame Véretz, kissing her forehead tenderly. She did not add that she liked to go to market, which was the truth. Among people who rise from small beginnings, some resent their past, and strive to forget it, while it pleases others to recall it.

"What have you there ?" exclaimed Madame Corneuil, seeing just then that her mother held a sheet of paper in her hand.

"This, my dear, is a note in which Monsieur de Penneville begs me to inform you that his great-uncle, the Marquis de Miraval, arrived yesterday from Paris, and has expressed a desire to be introduced, and that he will bring him here at two o'clock exactly. You know he is a victim to the stroke of the clock."

"What prevented him from coming to tell us himself ?"

"Apparently he feared disturbing you, and perhaps he did not care to disarrange his own plans. In all well-ordered lives the first rule is to work until noon."

Madame Corneuil grew impatient. "Who may this great-uncle be ?" she said. "Horace never told me about him."

"I can easily believe that. He never speaks of anything but you—or himself—or Egypt."

"But if I choose that he should talk to me about these!" answered Madame Corneuil haughtily. "Is that another epigram?"

"Do you think I could make epigrams against that dear, handsome fellow?" hastily answered Madame Véretz. "I already love him like a son."

Madame Corneuil seemed to have grown thoughtful. "I had bad dreams last night," said she. "You laugh at my dreams, because you like to laugh at my expense. Now see: In coming from Paris, Monsieur de Miraval must have passed through Vichy. This marquis is dangerous."

"Dangerous!" exclaimed Madame Véretz; "what danger have you to fear?"

"You will see that Madame de Penneville has sent him here."

"Can you believe that Horace—ah! my poor goose, are you not sure of his heart?"

"Is any one ever sure of a man's heart?" answered she, feigning an anxiety which she was far from feeling.

"Perhaps not of any man's?" said Madame Véretz, smiling; "but the heart of an Egyptologist is quite another thing, and never changes. As far as sentiment goes, Egyptology is the one unchangeable thing."

"I told you I had had bad dreams, and that the marquis is dangerous to us."

"Here is my reply," was her mother's answer, as she held before her a mirror in such a way as to oblige her to see herself in it.

"It seems to me as if I looked a fright this morning," said Madame Corneuil, who thought nothing of the sort.

"You are beautiful as the day, my dear countess, and I defy all the marquises in the world—"

"No, I will not receive this great-uncle," began Hortense

again, as she pushed aside the mirror ; “you may receive him in my place. Do you think I am obliged to endure impertinences ?”

“There you are !—you are putting things at their worst ; you are getting excited, forgetting yourself, and rushing to conclusions.”

“I tell you once more, I am ill.”

“My dear idol, one must never be ill except at the suitable moment ; and in this case take care, or he will fancy, you are afraid of him.”

Madame Corneuil, on reflection, was evidently convinced that her mother was right, for she said to her :

“Since you wish me to submit to be thus bored, so be it ! Order my breakfast to be brought up, and send my maid to me.

“Nothing could be better,” answered Madame Véretz. “Ah, my dear ! I am not inflicting a bore upon you—I am preparing a triumph for you.”

With these words she withdrew, not without kissing her for the second time.

At two o'clock precisely, Madame Véretz, seated in a rustic hut opposite the veranda of the chalet, was awaiting Count de Penneville and Monsieur de Miraval ; at two o'clock precisely the marquis and the count appeared on the horizon. The presentation was made with proper formality, and soon conversation began. Madame Véretz was a woman of great tact in all difficult circumstances ; sudden events never disconcerted her ; she knew how to receive an uncomfortable visitor as well as a disagreeable incident. Monsieur de Miraval, however, gave her no occasion to practise that virtue. He was thoroughly courteous and gracious ; he brought all the amiability and brilliancy of his past grandeur to bear on this occasion ; he took as much pains as he formerly did for the sovereigns of the world who gave him audience. Where was the use of having been a diplomatist if

not to possess the art of talking a great deal without saying anything? He had words at his command, and, when it was necessary, a fluent eloquence, the art of "pouring honey over oil," as the Russian proverb has it.

Everything went on well. Horace, who had greatly dreaded the interview, and who at first appeared constrained and disturbed, soon lost his anxiety, and felt his embarrassment at an end. It was part of his character to be quickly reassured. He was not only a born optimist, but he had gone too deeply into the theology of Egypt not to know that in the human world, as in the divine, the struggle between the two principles ends generally in the triumph of the good, that Typhon finally submits to be disarmed, and Horus, the beneficent deity, takes in hand the government of the universe. Count de Penneville's face expressed profound faith in the final triumph of Horus, the beneficent deity.

The ice was completely broken when Madame Corneuil made her appearance. We may easily believe that she had taken great pains for this occasion with her toilet and the arrangement of her hair; her half-mourning was most charming. It must be granted that as there are queens who strongly resemble ordinary people, so there are ordinary people who resemble queens, barring the crown and the king. That day Madame Corneuil was not merely a queen, she was a goddess from head to foot. She might have been described as Juno appearing from a cloud. Neither did she fail in her manner of entrance. On seeing her approach, the marquis could not repress a thrill of emotion, and, when he drew nearer to her to greet her with bowed head, he lost his self-command, which seldom happened to him; he stood confused, began several sentences without being able to finish them: it is said that it was the first time in his life that such a mishap had happened to him. His disturbance was so great that Horace, who usually never noticed anything, could not help remarking it.

Monsieur de Miraval made a great effort, and was not long in recovering his confidence and all his ease of manner. After a few trifling remarks, he began to relate pleasantly several anecdotes of his diplomatic career, which he seasoned with graceful wit and a grain of salt.

As he told his little stories, he went on talking to himself. "There is no denying it, she is very beautiful; she is a superior woman, fit for a king. What eyes! what hair! what shoulders! Can she be the daughter of such a mother, and all those beautiful, fair locks come from that red hair? There is no denying it, her beauty irritates and exasperates me. If I were forty years younger, I would be one of her suitors. Really, she is superb. Can I find any fault with her? Yes, there is a restlessness in her eyes which I do not like. Her lips are rather thin—bah! that is only a foible. Heaven be thanked! there is no ink-spot on her finger-ends, but they are too tapering, too nervous, and look like hands ready to clutch. Her eyelids are too long—they can conceal a great deal. Her voice is well modulated, but metallic; still, if I were forty years younger—"

The marquis went on telling stories. Madame Véretz was all ears, and smiled with the best grace in the world. As for Madame Corneuil, she did not lay aside a somewhat disdainful gravity of bearing. She had come upon the scene with a certain part to play; she had got it into her head that she was to appear before an ill-disposed judge, who had come expressly to take her measure and to weigh her in the balance. So she armed herself with Olympian majesty and that insolence of beauty which tramples impertinence under foot, crushes the haughty, and transforms Actæons into stags. Although the marquis's politeness was faultless and emphatic, and although he besought her to look favourably upon him, she remained firm and would not be disarmed.

Horace listened to all with great satisfaction; he thought

his uncle charming, and could hardly keep from embracing him. He also thought that Madame Corneuil never had been more beautiful, that the sunlight was brighter than ever, that it streamed down upon his happiness, that the air was full of perfume, and that everything in the world was going on wonderfully. Yet now and then a slight shadow came like a cloud before his eyes. In reading over that morning the fragments of Manetho, he stumbled upon a passage apparently contradictory to his favourite argument, which was dear to him as life itself. At intervals he began to doubt whether it really was during the reign of Apepi that Joseph, son of Jacob, came into Egypt; then he reproached himself for his doubt, which came back to him the next moment. This contradiction grieved him greatly, for he had a great regard for Manetho. But when he looked at Madame Corneuil his soul was at rest again, and he fancied he could read in her beautiful eyes a proof that the Pharaoh who knew not Joseph must have been Sethos I., in which case the Pharaoh who did know him must have been King Apepi. To be tenderly loved by a beautiful woman makes it easy to believe anything, and all things become possible—Manetho, Joseph, King Apepi, and all the rest.

What was passing in the mind of the marquis? To what conquering charm had he fallen a victim? The fact was, he was no longer like himself. He had made an excellent beginning, and Madame Vêretz was delighted with his tales. Little by little his animation grew languid. This man, who was so great a master over his own thoughts, could no longer control them; this man, so great in conversation, was actually seeking in vain for the proper words. He struggled for some time against this strange fascination which deprived him of his faculties, but it was all in vain. He no longer took part in the conversation, except in a few detached phrases, which were absolutely irrelevant, and soon fell into a deep reverie and the dullest silence.

"My mother was right," said Madame Corneuil. "I have quite overawed him; I have made him afraid of me." And so, applauding herself for having silenced the batteries of the besieger and put out his fires, a smile of satisfied pride hovered around her lips. A moment after she rose to walk round the garden, and Horace hastened to follow her.

The marquis was left alone with Madame Véretz. He followed the pair of lovers with his eyes for a little while, as they slowly withdrew and finally disappeared behind the shrubbery. Then the spell seemed broken. Monsieur de Miraval regained his voice, and, turning towards Madame Véretz, exclaimed dramatically: "No, nothing has ever yet been created more beautiful than youth, more divine than love. My nephew is a fortunate fellow. I congratulate him aloud, but I keep my envy to myself."

Madame Véretz rewarded this ejaculation with a gracious smile which signified: "Good old fellow! we judged you wrongly. How can you serve us best?"

"The more I see them together, Monsieur le Marquis," said she, "the more I am convinced that they were made for one another. Never were two characters better matched: they have the same likes and the same dislikes, the same elevated tone of mind, the same scorn for vulgar ideas and petty calculations, the same disregard of vulgar interests. They both live in paradise. Ah! Monsieur le Marquis, only a providential dispensation could have brought them together."

"Very providential," said the marquis, but he added, *in petto*, "A manœuvring mother is the surest of all providences." Then he resumed aloud: "After all, what is the aim of it? Happiness. My nephew is right to consider his affection only. He can have his paradise, as you call it, madame, and all the rest into the bargain; for Madame Corneuil—We will not speak of her beauty, which is incom-

parable, but it is impossible to see her or to hear her speak without recognising her to be a most superior woman, the most suitable in the world to give a man good counsel, and to lead him onward, to push him forward."

"You certainly judge her correctly," answered Madame Véretz. "My daughter is a strange being; she is full of noble enthusiasm which she carries at times to exaltation, and yet she is thoroughly reasonable, very intelligent as regards the things of this world, and at the same time, dead to her own interests and ardent for those of others."

"One thing alone distresses me," said the marquis to her. "The story-teller advises all happy lovers to roam only to neighbouring shores, and ours are going to bury their happiness in Memphis or in Thebes. It would be a crime to take Madame Corneuil away from Paris."

"Reassure yourself," said she; "Paris will have them back again."

"You do not know my nephew: he has a horror of that perverse and frivolous city. He confided to me yesterday that he means to end his days in Egypt, and assured me that Madame Corneuil was as much in love as he was with the solitude and silence of the region of the Thebaid. He appears very gentle, but there never was a person of more determined will."

"Heaven help him!" said Madame Véretz, looking at the marquis as if she would say, "My fine friend, there is no will which can stand against ours, and Paris can no more do without us than we without Paris."

"They have chosen the good part," continued Monsieur de Miraval with a deep sigh. "I have often laughed at my nephew, blaming him because he did not know how to enjoy life; now it is his turn to laugh at me, for I am reduced to envying his happiness. There comes an age when one regrets bitterly not having been able to make a home for

one's self. But you must be astonished, madame, at my confidences."

"I am rather flattered by them, than astonished," answered she.

"I am a prey to weariness, I must acknowledge. I had determined to pass the remainder of my days in retirement and in quiet, but *ennui* will yet force me out of my den. I shall plunge into active political life again. I have been urged to stand for the arrondissement where my château is situated, and have also been proposed for the Senate. I might rise still higher if I were married to a woman of sense, intelligent in the things of this world, in spite of her enthusiasms. Women are a great means of success in politics. Would that I had a wife! as the poet says: 'Have I passed the season of love? Ah! if my heart,' etc., etc. I cannot remember the rest of it, but never mind. Lucky Horace! thrice happy! What a vast difference there is between living in Egypt with the woman one loves, and bustling about Paris in the whirl of politics without her!"

Madame Vêretz in truth thought the difference vast, but greatly to the advantage of the bustle and the whirl. She could not help thinking, "It would be perfect if my future son-in-law only had the tastes and inclinations of his uncle; there would be nothing more to wish for."

From that moment, the Marquis de Miraval became a most interesting being to her. She tried to reconcile him to his fate, and, as she had a genius for detail and for business, she asked him a great many questions about his electoral arrondissement and his chances of election. The marquis, somewhat embarrassed, replied as best he could. He could not get out of it except by changing the subject, and so he gave the inquisitive woman a full description of his château, which was doubtless well worth the trouble, only he seldom visited it. The minute information which he gave respect-

ing his estates and their revenues was not of such a nature as to chill the interest which she was beginning to take in him.

During all this time, Madame Corneuil strolled along a path in the garden with Horace, who did not notice that her nerves were greatly excited and that she was somewhat ruffled. There were a great many things which Count de Penneville never noticed.

"Heavens ! what beautiful weather," said he to her ; "what a beautiful sky, what a beautiful sun ! Still it is not the sun of Egypt ! when shall we see it again ? 'Oh, thither, thither, let us go,' as Mignon's song says. You must sing that song to me to-night ; no one sings it like you. This park never seemed so green to me as now. There is no denying the beauty of green grass, although I can get on wonderfully well without it. I once knew a traveller who thought Greece horrible because there were so few trees. There are people who are wild on the subject of trees. Do you remember our first excursion to Gizeh—the vast bare plain, the wavy hills, the ochre-coloured sand ? You said, 'I could eat it !'

"We met a long line of camels ; I can see them now. The pyramids pierced the horizon, and they seemed white and sparkling. How they stood out against the sky ! They seemed quivering. The air here never quivers. What a good breakfast we had in that chapel ! You wore a tarbush on your head, and it became you like a charm. When shall I see you in a tarbush again ? The turkey was somewhat lean, I remember, and I made a great blunder—I let fall the jar which held our Nile-water. We laughed, and had to drink our wine unmixed. After which we descended into the grotto, and I interpreted hieroglyphics to you for the first time. I shall never forget your delight at my telling you that a lute meant happiness, because the sign of happi-

ness was the harmony of the soul. In the Chinese writings, happiness is represented by a handful of rice. After that, who could contest the immense superiority of soul in the genius of the Egyptians over the inhabitants of the Celestial Empire?"

At length he discovered that Madame Corneuil made no reply to him; he sought for an explanation and soon found it. "How did the Marquis de Miraval impress you?" asked he in an anxious voice.

This time she answered. "He is very *distingué*. He begins stories remarkably well, but finishes them poorly. Must I be sincere?"

"Absolutely sincere."

"He does not please me much."

"Did he say anything to offend you?" exclaimed Horace, who was afraid his uncle might have been disagreeable while his mind was wandering with Manetho and King Apepi.

"He is a man of talent," answered she, "but I like some soul, and I suspect he has none." As she uttered these words she fastened her great brown eyes on the face of the young man; he saw a soul in their depths; he might perhaps have seen two.

"You must be frank in your turn," resumed she. "You do not know how to tell a lie, and that is one reason why I love you. You told me that you were going to write to Madame de Penneville. The marquis is her answer."

"I must admit it is so," said he, "but, if the whole universe should put itself between you and me, it would have its trouble for nothing. You know that I love and adore you."

"Your heart, then, is indeed mine, wholly mine?" asked she, with a most bewitching glance.

"For ever, for ever yours," answered he, in a voice half choked with emotion.

They drew near an arbour, the entrance to which was

narrow. Madame Corneuil went in first, and when Horace joined her she stood motionless before him, gazing at him with a melancholy smile. Until that moment she had kept him at a distance, without allowing him to make any advances, but now by a sudden impulse she raised her lips and forehead to him, as if to claim a kiss. He understood, and yet feared lest he should have mistaken. He hesitated, but at last ventured to press his lips to hers. He felt ill. Only once before had he felt the same wild emotion. It was one day near Thebes, when making an excavation, he saw with his eyes—his own eyes—at the bottom of the trench, a great sarcophagus of pink granite. That day, too, he grew faint.

Madame Corneuil sat down; he fell at her feet, and, resting his elbows upon her beloved knees, devoured her glances for a while. There was only the width of a path between the arbour and the lake; they heard the waves murmuring to the beach. She stammered a few words of love; she spoke of that joy and mystery which no human tongue can express.

After a long silence Madame Corneuil said: "Great happiness is always restless and uneasy, everything frightens it—it is scared at everything. I implore you to get rid of this diplomatist. I never liked diplomatists. All they can see in the world is prejudice, interest, calculation, and vanity."

"Your wishes are sacred to me," said he to her, "and, even if I must for ever break with him, I will do everything to please you, although I have always returned the friendship he has borne for me."

"Yes, send him back to his family, who must object to our having him. May he soon return to tell his stories to them!"

"But allow me—I am his family; he is unmarried, or

rather he has been a widower for thirty years, and has neither son nor daughter. But what do I care for his property?"

At these words Madame Corneuil emerged from her rapture, and pricked up her ears like a dog who scents unexpected game. "His property! You his heir! You never told me so."

"And why should I have told you? What is money to us? This is my treasure," added he, trying to get a second kiss, which she wisely refused, for one must not be too lavish.

"Yes, how base a trifle the whole subject of money is!" said she. "Is the marquis very rich?"

"My mother says that he has an income of two hundred thousand francs. He may do what he pleases with it. Since you do not like him, I will tell him plainly that I renounce my position as his heir."

"It must all be done with propriety," answered Madame Corneuil with considerable animation. "You are fond of him. It would make me wretched to set you against a relation whom you love."

"I would give up all for you," exclaimed he; "all else seems such a trifle."

He remained a little longer at her feet; but, to his great grief, she made him rise, saying: "Monsieur de Miraval will remark our long absence from him. We must be polite."

Two minutes after she entered the pavilion, whither Horace followed her, and greeted the marquis with a tinge of affability which she had not shown before; but, although she had changed her expression and manner, the spell was not broken, and its effect was even more perceptible. Monsieur de Miraval, after having recovered all his wits in conversing with Madame Véretz, and giving her all sorts of confidences, was disturbed anew at the appearance of his beautiful enemy. He replied to all her advances in incoher-

ent phrases, and sentences without head or tail, which might have fallen from the moon. Soon, as if angry with himself and his undignified weakness, he rose hastily, and, turning towards Madame Véretz with a profound bow, took leave of her; then, advancing towards Madame Corneuil, he looked her full in the eyes, and with a sort of fierceness in his voice said: "Madame, I came, I saw, and I have been conquered."

Thereupon he withdrew like one wishing to make his escape, and forbade his nephew to accompany him. It can be easily imagined that after his departure he was freely discussed. All agreed that his conduct was peculiar; Madame Véretz protested that she thought him more charming than odd, but Madame Corneuil thought him more odd than charming. Horace, for his part, tried to explain the eccentricity of his conduct by his varying state of health, or by a certain whimsical disposition excusable at his age.

"There is some mystery about it which you must take pains to clear up," said Madame Corneuil to him; and as he looked at his watch and was about to withdraw—"By the way, lazy boy," said she, "when are you going to read me the famous fourth chapter of your 'History of the Hyksos'? You must remember that you were to read it some evening with a midnight supper in its honour. We must have that supper in Paris. Will it not be delicious?"

At the thought of the little private banquet in honour of Apepi, Horace's heart thrilled with delight and his eyes beamed. "I will read you nothing until it is worthy of you. Give me ten days more."

"Ten days—that is a century!" said she; "but keep your word, or I shall break with you." As he withdrew she added, "The next time you meet Monsieur de Miraval, be on your guard and shrewd."

"He shrewd!" exclaimed Madame Véretz, when left alone with her daughter; "you might as well order him to swim across the lake."

"Is that meant for another epigram?" said Madame Corneuil crossly.

"Since I adore him as he is," answered the mother, "what more can you expect? As for Monsieur de Miraval, you are quite wrong to worry yourself on his account. My opinion is, that he is entirely won over to our side."

"It is not mine," answered Madame Corneuil.

"At all events, my dear, we must treat him with great tact, for I know from the very best authority—"

"You are going to tell me," interrupted Madame Corneuil disdainfully, "that he has an income of two hundred thousand francs, and that Horace is his heir. Such base trifles are like affairs of state to you."

Soon after she said to her mother, "Then ask Horace to invite him to breakfast with us at an early day."

IV.

THE following afternoon Count de Penneville went to the Hôtel Gibbon, hoping to see his uncle there, but he did not find him. He left his card with a few words to express his regret at having taken his drive for naught, and to tell him that Madame Véretz and her daughter would be happy to see the Marquis de Miraval to breakfast on the following day. The marquis sent him his reply in the evening; he said that he was not well, and begged his nephew to excuse him to the ladies, whose kind attention touched him deeply. Uneasy about his uncle's health, Horace went in the morning, contrary to his usual habits, to ask after him. This time also the nest was empty, and the count had both the vexation of having taken his walk for nothing and the pleasure of concluding that the invalid must be well again.

Urged by Madame Corneuil, he wrote to convey to him an-

other invitation to breakfast. The marquis replied by special messenger that he had just decided to return to Paris, and was much grieved that he had not even time to bid them good-bye.

This sudden and unexpected departure excited the Pension Vallaud greatly. They talked of it for a full hour by the clock, and they talked of it every day following. Monsieur de Penneville was the first to get over his surprise. "Come what may," thought he, "I am firm as a rock," and he would soon have begun to think of something else. The mother and daughter were less philosophical. Madame Véretz was painfully surprised, and keenly disturbed at having been so mistaken, for she prided herself upon never being mistaken. Madame Corneuil taunted her triumphantly.

"I congratulate you upon your penetration," remarked she. "You said that Monsieur de Miraval was entirely gained over to our side. It turns out that all his kindness did not even reach the first principles of civility. He came as a spy, and he has gone back at once to report to Madame de Penneville. We shall soon hear from him, and the news will not be very pleasant. I am quite sure that you did not know how to behave to him, and said something which has compromised us."

"Is that the way I am in the habit of acting, my dear?" answered Madame Véretz. "I confess that his conduct surprises me. It is contrary to all my notions of the customs of nations. Before going to war, a gentleman should declare it. This monster has concealed his game well."

"You have always been blindly confident."

"And yet evil tongues persist that I am a successful manœuvring mother. Do not overwhelm me, my darling; what distresses me is that an inheritance yielding an income of two hundred thousand francs does not grow on every bush."

"You think of nothing but the inheritance. That may well be questioned; but there is some dark plot going on, of

which we shall soon see the results. This old fellow intends to play some trick of his own upon us."

"Let us wait awhile," said Madame Véretz; "it needs heavy cannon to take fortresses. Say what you like, we may sleep at our ease in our beds."

Three days after, Madame Véretz, unknown to her daughter, went out very early to do her own marketing, and, on her return, entered stealthily into the Count de Penneville's apartment, opened the door of his study, and with her hand upon the latch, said to him: "Do you want to know something, my pretty blue-bird? Monsieur de Miraval has not left Lausanne. I just met him crossing the Place Saint-François."

"That is impossible!" answered he, dropping his pen.

"Perhaps it is impossible, but it is more true than impossible," said she, rushing off.

Horace went forthwith to the Hôtel Gibbon, and was no more successful than before. He returned in the evening, and his perseverance was at last rewarded. He was overjoyed to see Monsieur de Miraval assisting his digestion by smoking a cigar on the terrace of the hotel.

"Well, uncle," said he, "I thought you had gone."

"The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak," answered the marquis. "Lausanne is such a delightful town that I had not the courage to tear myself away."

"Condescend to explain."

"Come up into my room," interrupted he; "we can talk better there."

As soon as they entered it, the marquis threw himself into a chair, murmuring, "Oh, how tired I am!" then he offered an easy-chair to his nephew, who said to him: "Once for all, let us understand one another. Friend or enemy?"

"Let us make a distinction. Friend of the dear fellow before me, but a determined enemy, a sworn enemy, and a mortal enemy to his marriage."

"So Madame Corneuil was not so fortunate as to please you!" resumed Horace, in a tone of bitter irony.

"Quite the contrary," said the marquis, excitedly. "You did not say enough that was good about that woman. There is only one word suitable—she is adorable."

"But uncle, if that is so—"

"Adorable, I say it again; but not at all suited to you. To begin with, you think you love her—you do not love her."

"Be kind enough to prove that."

"No, you do not love her. You see her through the medium of your mutual reminiscences of travel, through the medium of the delight you took in explaining the tomb of Ti to her. You see her through Egypt and the Pharaohs. From the summit of the pyramids, forty centuries have looked down upon your betrothal, and that is why your love is so dear to you. It is a pure mirage of the desert! Leave out Egypt, leave out Ti, breathe on the rest, and nothing remains."

"If that is your only objection—"

"I have another. You are not of the same age."

"She is seventeen months, two weeks, and three days older than I. Is that worth talking about?"

"I hope your figures are right. I know your strict exactness in all kinds of calculation. But this woman is very mature in character, and you will be a child all your life. It might be said of you as of the Bishop of Avranches, 'When will his reverence get through his studies?' If you were in business, diplomacy, or politics, I should say, 'Marry that phoenix; your future will be secure.' But it would be ridiculous for a perpetual scholar to marry Madame Corneuil. You flatter yourself that you are inspiring her with your own tastes and your enthusiasms, which only fill her with indulgent compassion. You bore her with your talk about Manetho; but, as she has many talents, one of them is that of sleeping without showing it."

"Have you finished, dear uncle?"

"My sweet friend, I will spare you the rest."

"Have you written to my mother?"

"Not yet; I do not know what to write. I am greatly embarrassed."

"If you remember, you gave me your word of honour as an uncle and a gentleman that you would do nothing without my knowledge."

"Upon my word of honour, both as uncle and as a gentleman, you may see my letters. Come again in two days, at this same hour, because I do not come in until dinner-time. I will show you the rough drafts."

"Now we understand each other," answered Horace; "it is war, but an honourable war."

And he took leave of his uncle without shaking hands, so deeply did he take to heart the impertinent insinuations of Monsieur de Miraval; but on his way back he soon began to find them rather more amusing than impertinent. He ended by rehearsing them to himself laughingly, and he also laughingly repeated them to Madame Corneuil, to whom he gave a minutely faithful and exact account of his visit at the Hôtel Gibbon. His sincerity was rewarded by a most enchanting smile and many evidences of lovely and delightful tenderness. As in the harbour, a radiant brow was bent forward as if to meet his lips. It is not true that there is no kiss like the first. The second filled Horace with such sweet intoxication that he could not work the rest of the day without abstraction. He was busy in remembering it.

His surprises were not over. Upon going the next day but one to the rendezvous appointed by his uncle, he learned that Monsieur de Miraval had left the evening before, and this time for good. No one could tell where he had gone. He had paid his bill, and quitted the hotel without further explanation. Did the marquis suspect that his inconsistent and whimsical behaviour was troubling greatly the heart

of an adorable woman, and even disturbing her nightly repose? Madame Corneuil was again overcome by these perplexities, which told upon her disposition. Madame Vétetz had hard work to defend herself, although, to tell the truth, she was not in the least to blame.

"Bah!" said Horace to them. "We distress ourselves altogether too much about all this. What is the use of tormenting ourselves and bothering our heads about it? Let us not suspect dark mysteries where there are none at all. I had not seen my uncle before for two years. Perhaps, fresh as he seems, the approach of age may make itself felt; perhaps he may not have all his wits. I am distressed about it, for I love him dearly; and, if he is losing his mind, I freely forgive him for the outrageous things he said to me."

He did not know what to think when, at the end of a week, one morning when it was pouring hard, he saw Monsieur de Miraval enter his study, looking sober and melancholy, with clouded brow and lack-lustre eye.

"Where did you come from, uncle?" exclaimed he.

"Where should I come from if not from my hotel?" answered the marquis.

"But you left it a week ago."

"I mean the Hôtel Beau-Rivage, on the edge of the lake at Ouchy, the port of Lausanne, where I settled myself, after I became dissatisfied with the Hôtel Gibbon."

"I know very well," said Horace, "that the Hôtel Beau-Rivage is at Ouchy, neither am I ignorant of the fact that Ouchy is the port of Lausanne. But I do not know why you changed your quarters without letting me know."

"Excuse me, boy—I am so busy."

"With what?"

"That is my secret."

"I am sorry for it, uncle, but your secret does not make you happy. Where is all your gaiety? You seem as dismal to-day as a prison. Can you be tormented by remorse?"

"What makes you think of remorse? This cursed rain troubles me. Look at that lake; it is rough and ugly. Does it always rain hereabouts? Have you a barometer?"

"Here is one at your service. Pray do you confide your secrets to my mother? Have you in your pocket the rough draft of the letter which you were to show me?"

The marquis answered neither yes nor no. He walked up and down the room, cursing the rain which prevented everything, and every now and then he returned to the barometer, which he tapped obstinately in hope that it might indicate fair weather. Then, in the midst of a lamentation, he took his hat and rushed out as brusquely as he had entered, in spite of his nephew's efforts to keep him to breakfast.

The next day, being Sunday, it did not rain, thanks to heaven, but it made up for it by blowing very hard. The lake, lashed by the breeze, was no longer itself; it had the appearance of an angry ocean. The marquis returned at the same hour, looking as cross and as disturbed as on the previous day, swearing against the wind as energetically as he had protested against the rain. He could talk of nothing else, and again tapped the barometer, but this time he wished to make it fall. "The stupid thing has gone up too high!" growled he.

"It probably did not understand exactly what you wanted it to do," said Horace.

"I am in no mood for joking," answered he, "and am going out."

In vain Horace tried to keep him; he reached the door and stairway, whither his nephew followed him, and then, taking his arm, said that he was determined to accompany him back to his hotel. He hoped that on his way thither he might make him talk of something besides the wind. They had not gone fifty steps when they saw a carriage coming at full speed, as if to get out of the storm, and in it were Madame Véretz and her daughter. The ladies were return-

ing from mass at Lausanne, where it has been celebrated ever since there has been a Catholic church on the Riponne.

Just as they were about to cross, Madame Véretz, who was always on the look-out, gave an order to the coachman, and the carriage stopped short. Horace took care not to let go his uncle's arm, and obliged him to halt. Evidently the charm at once began to act again, for as he drew near the open door of the carriage, and the marquis encountered the glance of Madame Corneuil, his countenance fell. He bowed awkwardly, muttered a few words utterly devoid of sense or any pretensions thereto, then, freeing himself from his nephew's grasp, he made another bow, and, turning his back upon them, disappeared.

"He grows more and more inexplicable," said Madame Véretz. "I begin to think his conscience troubles him."

"He is a conspirator with occasional twinges," said Madame Corneuil.

"He confessed to me yesterday that he had a secret," said Horace.

"I can guess it," resumed Madame Véretz.

"And to clear my conscience," answered Horace, "I am going to write to my mother this very evening."

As often happens, the wind suddenly fell during the night. In consequence, the marquis was not to be seen the next day. Madame Véretz strove to find out about him, and a few hours later she had the satisfaction of telling her daughter and Monsieur de Penneville that, every morning, except when it was rainy or windy, the Marquis de Miraval took the boat which crossed the lake from Ouchy to Evian, and passed the entire day in Savoy, returning at the very last moment to dine at the hotel. Now, what was his business in Savoy? They were lost in conjectures. The most probable conclusion at which they arrived was that Madame de Penneville had left Vichy for Evian, and that her agent and emissary joined her every day to confer with

her, and that the bomb would explode before long. Madame Véretz seriously expressed a wish, although under the form of a joke, that the marquis should be tracked, and that Monsieur de Penneville should go to Evian next day to find out what was going on. Her daughter and Horace disliked the idea, and declined the proposition, one from honour, the other from prudence. Madame Corneuil, who had been timid ever since the night when she had been so disturbed by bad dreams, said to herself, "Out of sight out of mind." Not that she minded so much that for an entire day the lake would separate her and her beloved, but she was afraid lest, in the chances of this expedition, he might fall into the hands of the Philistines, who would get him away from her.

Their anxiety was soon over. Horace had written to his mother, and received from her the following reply:

"My dear Child,—Monsieur de Miraval agreed to let you know my inmost thoughts on the subject of the marriage which you are contemplating. Why do you speak of plotting? Your uncle wrote to me, and, to prove to you how sincerely I am acting in this matter which troubles me so much, I take upon myself to send you his letter, begging you to say nothing to him about it, for he would not easily forgive my indiscretion. You will see by this letter how little he is prejudiced against the woman you love, and consequently the objections which he makes to your scheme deserve to be taken into serious consideration by you. Your mother, who desires nothing but your happiness."

The letter of the marquis ran thus:

"My dear Mathilde,—I have delayed taking pen in hand and trust you will forgive me. The case is altogether different from what I expected, and demands further reflection. I have very little hope of separating Horace from her

whom I call his 'asp of the Nile.' I promised you that I would bring all my diplomatic talent to bear on this occasion. I was wrong to be so sure of my weapons; what can diplomacy effect where such a woman is concerned? You know that I came here armed with prejudices to the teeth; you know, also, that I am somewhat a judge of both men and women, and that I do not lack quickness of perception. I have seen and I have been conquered; I could not help saying so to Madame Corneuil herself. I will not speak to you of her marvellous beauty, the grace of her wit, her literary talent, which is of the highest order, or the nobility of her sentiments. One word will suffice. You know how great was my horror of this marriage; I entered upon a campaign of which I have a very disagreeable remembrance. For the first time—you will believe you are dreaming, my dear, and yet it is only too true—yes, if it were not for Horace, if Madame Corneuil's heart were free, if my sixty-five years did not terrify her, yes, I would without hesitation dare to venture all, and I believe I could thus secure happiness during the few years I have yet to live. You will laugh at me, and rightly. Fortunately, Horace exists; and, besides, be assured, I should stand no chance of being accepted.

"There, let us leave my little Utopia and speak of Horace. If things are so, you will say, let him marry her! No, my dear Mathilde, I do not think it would be a happy marriage. There is a decided want of sympathy in the disposition, taste and character of these two beings; it is impossible for me to admit that they are made for one another. I have spoken my mind freely to Horace, but there is no reasoning with a lover. You might as well play the flute to a fish. I have tried both lovers and fish unsuccessfully, and they are the hardest creatures on earth to persuade. Nevertheless, I will make one more attempt and renew the attack at the favourable moment, and you shall hear from me before long. But I must say, without reproaching you, however, that I regret

bitterly ever coming to Lausanne; you little suspect the poor service you rendered me in sending me hither, or the stormy days and troubled nights spent here by your old uncle, who embraces you."

Five minutes after reading this letter—that is to say, at ten o'clock in the morning—Horace, transgressing all the rules of the country, ran to the chalet, where he was received by Madame Véretz. He was beside himself, and the first thing which he did was to burst out laughing.

"Hush!" said she, grasping him by the arm. "Do you forget that it is against rules to laugh here in the morning?"

Horace threw a passionate kiss in the direction of the sanctuary and said to Madame Véretz: "Dear madame, come as soon as you can into the garden, for positively I must laugh." As soon as they were in the arbour—"Oh," resumed he, "something altogether too funny has happened!"

"What has happened? What is it all about?"

"My poor, poor uncle!" and he burst out laughing again.

"Explain yourself, for pity's sake!" said Madame Véretz.

"Fancy! He is desperately in love with Hortense."

Madame Véretz started. "You are telling me a most extraordinary story."

"Only listen to me, please." Thereupon he read both letters aloud, interrupting his reading at intervals to indulge freely in his gaiety.

The first thing Madame Véretz did was to laugh also, the second to listen with religious attention, the third to take the letters, which Horace had just read, out of his hands, and to verify the most interesting passages. It is well to believe only one's own eyes.

"Oh my poor uncle!" exclaimed Horace. "So this was your famous secret! He must have rewritten that letter ten times before sending it off; he was afraid my mother would laugh at him. Just notice the pains he has taken to

make it all a joke, and yet how, in spite of himself, he betrays the seriousness of his passion. Yes, 'his days are stormy and his nights disturbed.' I can well conceive it. I beg you to note how everything is explained—his incoherent conduct, his blushes, his perplexity, his singular attacks of rudeness, and all his impolite behaviour towards you, when he is so polite and such a slave to conventionality! He has determined not to set foot in your house again, as the butterfly resolves not to fly again into the flame of the candle. Every morning he thinks, 'I must leave Lausanne, I will go away,' but has not the courage to go. And, since he cannot keep still, he airs his love-troubles on the lake. We wondered what he could be doing in Savoy. He goes to Meillerie to look at the rock of Saint-Preux, and rehearse his sorrows in its great shadow. Then he says to himself again, 'I must go,' and yet he does not go, but every day begins to make his wide and monotonous circuit round the chalet, where his heart remains fixed."

"Yes," said Madame V éretz; "that is it. We must believe that the planets love the sun, and yet fear it. That is the reason why they move round it in circles."

"But, to speak the truth," observed Horace, resuming his serious manner, "that is not precisely the way astronomers explain the thing."

"Heaven help them!" said Madame V éretz. With these words she slipped into her pocket the marquis's letter, which Horace never thought of asking for again.

"Really," continued he, "I love and respect my uncle, and it goes against my conscience to laugh at him. But I cannot pity him. He undertook a very ugly mission; and pray observe that even now he flatters himself that he may gain the case, and he still cherishes, I know not how, a faint hope. Heavens! how I long to tell the story to dear Hortense!"

"If you think anything of my judgment, my dear count,

you will not tell her a word of it, not a single word," answered Madame V éretz, seriously. "Let us laugh over it between ourselves like two schoolfellows, but you know Hortense does not like to laugh. She is so sensitive that that which amuses us might wound or grieve her."

"Heaven preserve me from that ! Still, I am sorry that you forbid it, it is such a good story !" Thereupon he left her, but, on returning to his own room, said to himself, "No matter, sooner or later, when the right moment comes, I shall speak about it to Hortense."

V.

It was nearly ten o'clock in the evening. The mother and daughter were alone in their *salon*. Madame V éretz was seated at her embroidery-frame, Madame Corneuil was leaning back dreamily on a lounge ; as she was not meditating, it was allowable to talk.

"Then to-morrow is the great day," said her mother to her, in lifting her head from her work.

"What do you mean ?"

"Monsieur de Penneville is to produce his great work. He has told me that his manuscript is seventy-three pages long, neither more nor less ; you know how important those pages are. We shall not get off under less than two whole hours of it by the clock. That man's voice is so distinct and penetrating that we can hear without listening. It fills our ears whether we wish it or not. You are fortunate, my dear : Monsieur de Miraval told the truth when he said that you have the faculty of sleeping without showing it."

"That is rather a questionable joke," answered Madame Corneuil haughtily.

"It is no crime in my eyes ; we must protect ourselves against Apepi as well as we can. Every one has his own way

of getting out of the rain. Heavens ! the dear fellow may have his peculiarities, but that does not prevent him from having a kind heart, and all that ; neither does it prevent him from being adored."

"Oh, yes, I adore him," answered Madame Corneuil sharply, "or rather, Monsieur de Penneville is inexpressibly dear to me, and I beg you never to doubt that."

Madame V éretz began to embroider again, and after a short silence said : "Good heavens ! what a pity !"

"What is the matter now ?"

"What a pity it is that the uncle is not the nephew, or the nephew the uncle !"

"What uncle are you talking about ?"

"The Marquis de Miraval."

"That conspirator ! That dreadful old man !"

"You never gave him a fair look—he is not dreadful at all. His expression is charming, his voice is fresh, his hand dimpled and soft, just the hand of a diplomatist or prelate. Do you dislike him so much ?"

"Unspeakably."

"You are unjust, very unjust ; he has a great many different kinds of merit. In the first place he is a marquis ; the other is only a count, and the streets are full of counts. Then, too, his income is not sixty thousand francs ; he has more than three times as much."

"Two hundred thousand," said Madame Corneuil. "Why do you stop there ?"

"Yet another advantage ; if he chooses to marry again, he is not obliged to endeavour to reconcile his mother to the marriage. We may try in vain. Madame de Penneville will never like us. You see that she will break with her son, and that will be a bad thing for you. The world, in such cases, always sides with the mother ; and then, Monsieur de Miraval is no antiquary, but a man of the world, and, what is more, a very ambitious one. He has determined to enter

political life again ; before many months he will be either deputy or senator, as he chooses."

"Who told you so?"

"He himself, and he added that his only grief was that he was unmarried, for he needed a *salon*, and there could be no *salon* without a wife. The other only cares for grottoes, and only sighs for his dear Memphis, whither he will take you at once."

"You know well," answered she quickly, "that Horace will do exactly as I wish."

"Do not trust to that. Monsieur de Miraval says he is gentle but determined. Good heavens ! what can we find to do in Egypt, we who look upon our lives as a vocation, as an apostleship ? The bottom of an hypogeum is a fine place to follow a vocation in !"

"What has gone wrong with you to-night ?" said Madame Corneuil, shaking her beautiful head like a bored Muse, and pouting her Juno lips like a Juno who has not yet met her Jupiter.

Madame Véretz drew her needle in and out, and hummed a tune to herself. Madame Corneuil renewed the conversation. "I do not know what possesses you," remarked she ; "you seem to have set to work to disgust me with my happiness. Who was it who wished for this marriage, or at least advised it ?"

"Love makes up for everything else, my daughter. So regret nothing, since you love him."

"Heavens ! you know very well that I have never met the man of my dreams. But I love Horace ; I mean, by that, that I have liked him and still like him. But you have not told me why to-night—"

"Good !" thought Madame Véretz, "we have got over adoration," and she resumed aloud : "My beauty, Monsieur de Penneville is a splendid *parti*, I do not dispute that, and I recommended him because I had nothing better to offer."

"While to-night—?"

"Ah, to-night I know of another one."

Madame Véretz rose from her chair, and, after rummaging in her pocket, drew near her daughter, and said to her: "Read these two letters; I do not give them to you, I only lend them, for Monsieur de Penneville noticed that I kept them, and I must send them back to him to-morrow morning."

Madame Corneuil cast her eyes disdainfully over the first of the two letters; but, when she began the second, she changed her position, roused herself from her languor, her pale cheek was suffused with colour, and something could be read in her eyes which her drooping eyelids did not strive to conceal. And yet, when she had finished reading, she rose, enclosed both letters in an envelope, begged her mother to direct it, rang for Jacquot, and said to him: "Take this packet to Count de Penneville immediately!" after which she sank back on the lounge again.

"Did those scraps of paper burn your fingers?" asked Madame Véretz, with a smile.

"You should have spared me the trouble of reading such rubbish," answered she.

"Rubbish, my dear? What would the marquis say if he heard that? The poor man is dreadfully excited! It is his own fault: why did he come near a beautiful pair of eyes which are accustomed to work such miracles?"

"Not another word," rejoined the daughter. "You know I cannot endure that sort of jesting."

Madame Véretz returned to her embroidery. Madame Corneuil rose, and walked up and down the room restlessly and excitedly. Then she seated herself at the piano, and sighed forth in an agitated, passionate voice that song of Mignon's which Horace liked so well. She stopped in the middle of the last verse, and, turning towards her mother, said: "No, I do not understand you. Is it possible that you can seriously propose to me to give up a man who is full

of good qualities, a man worthy of my esteem, and personally attractive also?"

"The other morning, when he laughed so, he looked like a splendid sheep who had learned Coptic," interrupted Madame Véretz.

"A man who has my word," resumed she. "You dread scandal; I think, then, there would be something to criticise."

"It is only necessary to take proper precautions. We need not leave him—he can leave us."

"And for whom should I sacrifice him? for a man of seventy?"

"Oh, by your leave—the marquis is only sixty-five, and he does not look that. He has had a splendid past, and will still have a pleasant future. I predict a great success for him in the tribune, one of those successes which is rewarded with a ministry. France is so poor in men! and then, my dear idol, you had better believe that only old men know how to love! They are so pleased that they are tolerated; I will add also that Monsieur de Miraval has fine taste—he appreciates our writing. He stamps it 'of the highest order.'"

Thereupon Madame Véretz left her work again, ran to her daughter, and, clasping her in her arms, said:

"Are you vexed? Then we will say no more about it. Monsieur de Penneville and his uncle are totally unlike. You like one—"

"You never get the right word—I do not dislike him."

"And you do dislike the other?"

"Heavens! I did dislike him."

"Well, then they are both on the same footing, on the same level. The lists are open."

"You are quite right; you will end by offending me in good earnest," answered Madame Corneuil, lighting a candle to retire to her room.

As she was going out she drew near the window, and for a

moment gazed upon the starry vault as if to seek there for an inspiration. Then, turning to her mother, she said, resolutely and solemnly : "Be sure that I shall consult my heart alone. If you misapprehend my sentiments, I shall reserve the right to disclaim them."

Madame Véretz kissed her once more, saying : "You are just like the King of Prussia ; you talk about your heart and your conscience, and let things take their own course, merely reserving the right to disclaim your responsibility. Well, then, I will be your Bismarck." And with this, she accompanied her adorable angel to the door of her sacred retreat.

The next day a fine rain fell in the early morning, notwithstanding which the marquis did not visit his nephew, which disappointed Madame Véretz exceedingly ; perhaps she had intended to stop him on the way and take possession of him. In the afternoon the weather cleared up, and she proposed to her daughter to take a drive. Horace did not go with them ; he intended to go over his manuscript again, so that there should be no impediment in his reading it aloud in the evening ; he felt as if he could never do it justice.

As the ladies were returning from their drive along the beautiful esplanade of Montbenon, which commands a wonderful view of the lake and the Alps, Madame Véretz whose eyes ferreted out everything, perceived the marquis seated in a melancholy attitude upon a solitary bench. She alighted at once from the carriage, begging her daughter to return alone. A few minutes after, with seeming carelessness, she passed before the marquis at a distance of about ten paces, and uttered a little cry of joyful surprise. Monsieur de Miraval saw a most beautiful red chignon come between him and the Alps ; he would have preferred it to have been golden, but made the best of it.

"Thanks be to this happy chance !" exclaimed Madame Véretz. "You are my prisoner, Monsieur le Marquis, and must surrender at discretion."

He offered her his arm, saying: "I am much pleased with my jailer, dear madame."

"I will excuse you from being gallant," answered she. "I only wish you to speak to me openly, if that can ever be asked of a diplomatist. Will you be sincere?"

"I will be as sincere as Amen-heb, surnamed the truth-telling keeper of the flocks of Ammon."

"You must begin by acknowledging that I have a right to question you. Has not your conduct towards us been most peculiar? Since the day Monsieur de Penneville introduced you, you have taken every pains to avoid us."

"Believe me, madame—"

"Really, what harm could we have done to you? You certainly must have discovered that I was a fool."

"Dear madame, from the first moment when I had the honour of meeting you, I looked upon you as a woman of great talent."

"If that be so, can it be my daughter who has the misfortune to displease you?"

"Your daughter!" exclaimed the marquis. "Could I be so cursed by God and man! Why, she is adorable."

"The very words of the letter," thought Madame Vêretz; "he is right in sticking to it." Then she resumed: "Monsieur le Marquis, what means all this mystery, then?"

"Ah! madame," said he, looking slyly at her, "you are a very clever woman, and you live with those who can decipher hieroglyphics. I am afraid you may have divined me."

"You exaggerate my clairvoyance. I have divined nothing whatever. Is it true, as Monsieur de Penneville pretends, that you have a secret?"

"Can my nephew accidentally have discovered that secret? You alarm me; he is the last man in the world to whom I would make my confession."

"I can easily believe that," thought she; "we have the hare by the ears now." Gently pressing the marquis's arm,

she said to him : " Indeed, I do not understand you at all, and I like nothing better than making out people. Will you not reveal this dreadful secret to me ? "

" Never, madame, never. I have not yet lost all respect for my white hairs ; I stand in awe of them ; do you want me to cover them with everlasting ridicule ? "

" You are the only one who sees that they are white," said she, with a most encouraging glance.

" And then," resumed he, " you would betray me to Horace. For the first time an uncle trembles before his nephew."

" I shall have to give it up," thought Madame Véretz, a little angry ; " his white hairs and his nephew are a restraint upon him. He will not speak until the other has left the place." After a pause she resumed : " Monsieur le Marquis, if you had been less stingy of your visits you would have both honoured and delighted us, for I longed to see you, and talk with you about something which troubles me. I have my secret as well, and I longed to confide it to you. Yes, for several days I have been very much disturbed. Monsieur de Penneville, who has the unfortunate habit of telling everything—"

" Very unfortunate, indeed, madame ; I have often reproved him for it."

" Without curing him of it, however," pursued she, " since he repeated to us a conversation which he had had with you, without keeping back any of the objections which occurred to you on the subject of his marriage."

" I recognise him there, the wretch ! " said the marquis.

" It has given me a great deal to think of, and I am forced to respect your excellent reasons. I am greatly to blame, for I have been cruelly mistaken. There is not between those young people that harmony of character and of taste which is the first condition of happiness."

" How pleased I am to hear you speak thus ! " exclaimed

he. "The great point is harmony of tastes ; neither is that enough. According to the ideas of providence and also my own, marriage should be a mutual admiration society. Now, I have become acquainted with—yes, dear madame, I am acquainted with a woman of most uncommon merit. She has published admirable sonnets, which Petrarch might envy her if he were still alive, and a treatise on the duties and virtues of woman, to which Fénelon would not have refused to put his name if Bossuet would not have disputed the honour with him. Are you listening ? She lent those precious volumes to a man who pretends to be in love with her ; the unfortunate fellow could not read them through. I have seen both volumes : one is only half cut, the other is still untouched, absolutely uncut. The best part of the whole thing is, that the poor fellow fancies he has read them, and is ready to swear that he admires them. But don't repeat my story to Madame Corneuil."

"As for Madame Corneuil," answered she with a smile, "she will undoubtedly publish at some future day a book on the duties of mothers, and I am sure she will number indiscretion among their virtues. Alas ! mothers are often considered indiscreet, and the story you have just related is well suited to enlighten my daughter as to her own feelings and those which Horace pretends to entertain towards her. Besides, I ought to confess to you that she herself—"

"Speak, madame, speak ; you ought, you say, to confess to me that she herself—"

"Oh ! my daughter has so profound a soul that she keeps her feelings to herself. But for a long time I have observed that she is thoughtful, serious, almost sad, and I ask myself if she, too, may not have reflected."

The marquis let go Madame Véretz's arm that he might wipe his forehead with his handkerchief. There is such a thing in the world as perspiration caused by delight.

"Ah ! you are glad, old fellow !" said Madame Véretz

within herself. "You have forgotten your white hairs. Let us see if you are going to speak."

The marquis did not speak. It might have been said that his joy was so great as to make him forget where he was and with whom. Nevertheless, he finally remembered; and, seizing Madame Véretz's hand, he lifted it almost lovingly to his lips, so that she was afraid he had misunderstood her. "Dear madame," said he, "all men who meddle with literature have a passion which is stronger and more enduring than love, and that is self-love, and to kill the lover it is sometimes only necessary to prick the author with a pin."

"We were made to talk together," said she to him; "we understand each other with half a word. But pray, Monsieur le Marquis, if the prick of a pin does have such a wonderful effect, will you tell me your secret?"

"No, madame, but I will write it to you."

"That is a thing agreed upon," answered she, giving him her hand, which he pressed convulsively in his gratitude. She then turned towards the Pension-Vallaud, saying to herself, "That is the ideal son-in-law of my dreams."

VI.

HORACE had been reading fully twenty minutes. They were listening or pretending to listen to him. The pretty drawing-room of the chalet was situated on the ground-floor, and, as the evening was warm, the window had been left open. Had there been passers-by, the sound of their footsteps might have disturbed him; but, thanks to heaven, there were none. Jacquot and his horn had retired to his attic, and were peacefully sleeping in each other's arms. The birds in the park had agreed to keep silence, that they might hear better, without losing a word; it is true that the season had come when they had ceased to sing. From the bosom of their

ethereal abodes, the stars, those dwellers in eternal silence, cast a friendly glance upon him. He read with dignity, with zeal, and with conviction, but also modestly. Now and then he stopped to say: "If you have any observations to make, do not hesitate, I shall be much obliged to you for them." But they took very good care not to make any observations.

We said before that he had the precious faculty of combining sensations, by which he could enjoy several things at the same time, and all these different pleasures combined to make but one. The exquisite scent of jasmine in bloom came into the parlour through the half-open window. He breathed in the perfume with delight, and, although he was absorbed in his reading, he now and then looked out at the stars, and thought of those beautiful hazel eyes, which were lovelier to look upon than all the stars of heaven. He could not see those beautiful eyes, for Madame Corneuil was seated upon a luxurious divan in the background, where the glare of the lamp could not reach her. Reclining and silent, she was all ears, for darkness is favourable to attention. I cannot swear that her thoughts did not occasionally wander. She might have been thinking of the two uncut volumes. Madame Véretz was seated at her frame, opposite the reader, and, as she embroidered, gave him little approving nods. Her smile and the sparkle of her green eyes also expressed sufficiently the lively interest which she took in the Hyksos, unless that smile meant simply to say, "Heaven be praised, my dear sir—habit makes anything endurable!"

He continued to read, turning over the leaves regretfully, for he felt so happy that he wished that both his happiness and his reading might never come to an end. Before he began, a delicate hand, which he would have liked to hold for ever in his own, had placed before him a large glass of sweetened water. He moistened his lips with it, hemmed to clear his voice, and then resumed in these words:

“We have demonstrated that the history of Joseph, son of Jacob, as contained in the thirty-fourth chapter of Genesis and those following, bears the evident stamp of authenticity. The proper names, of so great importance in such cases, also bear further evidence. As every one knows, the officer of Pharaoh, chief of his guards or of his eunuchs, who bought Joseph from the Ishmaelites, and with whose wife he had that unfortunate adventure, from which he could only escape by leaving his cloak behind him, was called Potiphar, and Potiphar is simply Pet-Phra, which signifies consecrated to Ra, or the sun-god. Joseph received from Pharaoh the title of Zaphnath-paaneah, which must be translated into Zpent-Pouch; now, Zpent-Pouch means the creator of life, which proves sufficiently the gratitude which the Egyptians bore to Joseph for having provided for their sustenance during the famine. The daughter of a priest of On, or Annu, was given him in marriage.”

Here he turned to Madame Vêretz: “Is there any necessity for my explaining to you that On, or Annu, means the city of the sun, or Heliopolis?”

“Would you insult me so cruelly?” answered she.

“Then they bestowed upon him the daughter of a priest of On, or Annu, who was called Asenath, a name which can be explained as As-Neith, thus signifying that she was consecrated to the mother of the sun. After this only one thing remains to be proved to make us sure that the Pharaoh under whose reign Joseph came into Egypt was indeed the Shepherd King Apepi.”

“Here we are at last!” exclaimed Madame Vêretz joyfully. “I always loved that Apepi without knowing him.”

“Oh, I do not pretend to rank him too highly,” answered he, “and I should not dare to affirm even that he was a person to be loved; but he was a man of merit, and you will see that he was in some measure worthy of the consideration which you wish to bestow upon him. Neither can I say that

he was handsome, although there was character in his face. Do you ask how I know this? In the Museum of the Louvre, madame, in Cabinet A of the Historical Museum, there is a figure of green basalt, somewhat defaced, in which some pretend to recognise the best Saïte manner. Unfortunately, the tablets bearing the inscriptions have disappeared. Madame, I have the strongest reasons for believing that this precious statuette is not Saïte at all, but the portrait of one of the Shepherd kings, and that this Shepherd king is Apepi. So you perceive—" He lifted the glass to his lips again and took a second sip methodically, as he did everything ; then pursued his reading.

"For this purpose we are obliged to go further back. It was towards the end of the year 1830 before the Christian era that the sovereigns of the Theban dynasty began to rise against the Hyksos. After a long and painful struggle, in which they underwent every change of fortune, they drove the Shepherds into Lower Egypt. More than a century after, the king Raskenen was seated upon the throne of Thebes ; he is mentioned in a papyrus at the British Museum, the importance of which no one can fail to estimate. It happened, so it is written in this papyrus, that the land of Egypt fell into the hands of wicked rulers, and at that time there was not a king who was possessed of strength, health, or life. But behold ! the king Raskenen appeared, full of life, health, and strength, and he reigned over the region of the south. The wicked had possession of the fortress of the sun, and the entire country was subject to their impositions and taxes. The king of the wicked ones was called Apepi, and he chose for his lord," so says the papyrus, "the god Sutech, that is to say, the god Set, who is no other than the Greek god Typhon, genius of evil."

"It is true," interrupted Madame Véretz, "that Sutech, Set, and Typhon, upon close examination, do resemble each other strongly."

“O madame—please!” said he to her; “we are just coming to the principal point.”

And he resumed: “He erected in his honour a temple of solid masonry, and served none other of the gods of Egypt. So the papyrus teaches; and this important document proves: Firstly, that the Shepherd kings had taken up their abode in the Delta; secondly, that they had all Lower Egypt under their domination; and thirdly, that Apepi—”

Just then it occurred to him that it was long since he had heard the adored voice, that voice which sang Mignon’s song to him so well; so, turning towards the divan, he said: “He was also called Apophis, but Apepi is his real name. Which of the two do you prefer, Hortense?” Hortense made no response; perhaps her emotion at the narration had taken away her power of speech.

“Apophis or Apepi!” screamed Madame Véretz to her—“choose boldly. Monsieur de Penneville leaves it to your decision.” Alas! she made no reply.

Horace started, he felt a chill run through all his frame, like a premonition of destiny. He rose, seized a light, walked hastily towards the divan. It was only too true, he could doubt it no longer—Madame Corneuil was asleep! A little more, and he would have let fall from his hands the lamp which had thrown so much light upon his disaster.

“Heavens! how she sleeps!” exclaimed Madame Véretz. “Are you not something of a magnetiser?” She moved towards her daughter as if to awaken her. He drew her back, saying with a bitter sneer: “Oh, respect her repose, I implore you!”

It would be wrong to believe that the self-love of both author and reader did not suffer greatly. Light broke in upon him: he suddenly came to understand that for several months he had either deceived himself or allowed himself to be deceived. Perfectly motionless, with cool, fixed, and piercing eye, he gazed upon the face of the beautiful sleeper

whose pose was charming, for she knew well how to sleep. Nothing could have been lovelier than the disarray of her beautiful hair, one curl of which fell on her cheek. Her lips parted in a half smile; probably she was dreaming sweetly, and had sought refuge in a land where there was no Apepi.

Horace continued to gaze at her, and I know not what scales fell one by one from his eyes. Charming as she was, he saw her graces disappear every moment, and was on the point of thinking her plain. In truth, he recognised her no longer. The miracle which took place at Sakkarah, on coming out of the tomb of Ti, had been undone; the connection between the sleeper and Egypt was at an end. On leaving Cairo she had borne away in her golden hair, in her smile, and in her eyes, some of the sunshine which ripens the dates, and delights the heart of the lotus, and cheers the yellow sand of the desert with mirages, and from which the history of the Pharaohs cannot hide its secrets. The aureole with which it had crowned her brow was extinguished in a moment, and he perceived, too, that her eyelids were too long, her lips too thin, and her arms, which were softly rounded, ended in clutching hands, with sheathed claws; that there were little lines round her brow and mouth, and these coming wrinkles, which he had never before observed, betrayed to him the base workings of sordid passions—that restlessness of vanity which makes women old before their time. Whence came this sudden clairvoyance? He was angry, and, say what they may, intense anger is luminous.

“You must forgive her,” said Madame V éretz; “I have been watching her narrowly from the corner of my eye; she struggled bravely: unfortunately, her nerves are not so strong as mine. You have already put her to severe tests; she bore them honourably, but how can one hold out longer against that most dreadful of all bores, the Pharaonic bore? Be careful, my dear count, she has so much esteem and friendship for you; sometimes it only takes a very little

whim to weary a woman's heart." She pointed alternately to the closed eyes of her daughter and the seventy-three pages. "My dear count, you must choose between this and that."

As he listened, he took note of her with his haggard gaze, and her red hair filled him with horror. "Really, madame," said he to her, "it seems as if I were just beginning to know you." With these words he turned towards the table, gathered up his papers, put them into his portfolio, put the portfolio under his arm, made a low bow, and escaped.

"You can wake up, my dear," said Madame Vétetz, laughing; "we are delivered for ever from King Apepi, who lived forty centuries before Christ."

A head appeared above the window-sill, and a voice exclaimed from without: "Add sixteen to that, madame. It is best always to be exact."

Count de Penneville went back to his room with death in his soul. That which he so bitterly regretted was less a woman than a dream. For long months a vision had been the delicious companion of his days; she had never left him; she was interested in everything that he did; she ate and drank with him, she worked with him, and dreamed with him. She spoke to him, and he answered, and they understood one another before the words were spoken. Her voice melted his heart. She had golden hair, which had one day touched his cheek; she had lips, too, which his own had touched twice. As he went on thinking, his anger made him forget his grief; the poor fellow would have given a great deal to have his two kisses back again.

And yet he still had a faint hope. "No, it cannot be; such things do not happen," thought he. "She could not have let me leave her thus for ever. She will call me back; she is busy in writing to me now. Jacquot will come before midnight, bringing me a note which will explain all." No Jacquot came, and soon a neighbouring clock struck midnight. Its melancholy stroke resembled a funeral-toll. The

clock mourned for some one who had just died, and Horace realised that his dear companion, his vision, was no longer in the world. Henceforth he would be alone, utterly alone, and his solitude filled him with dread. His head fell upon his breast, and great tears rolled down his cheeks.

When he lifted his head he saw he was not alone; that on his table before him stood a little statuette a foot high, looking at him. Her name was Sekhet, the helper, and she stretched towards him her pretty little catlike face full of pitying kindness. He ran to her, and took her in his hands. "Ah!" said he, "you are here; how could I have forgotten you? I am not alone if you remain to me. Some one said on this very spot that roses would fade, but the gods remained." As he spoke thus he caressed her slender figure and her rounded thighs, and ended by kissing her devotedly on the forehead. It seemed to him as if the good little Sekhet really pitied his sorrows, and was moved and touched by them; that she had a kind little heart, like one of the gray nuns, or simply like a good, honest human being. It seemed to him also that there were tears in her eyes, goddess as she was, and that she returned his kiss, although she was nothing but a bit of blue porcelain. It seemed as if she said to him, "You have come back to me, and I will never lend you to any one again." And yet, good heavens! she had lent so little of him.

He felt comforted, as if he had purified both heart and lips. He stood before the glass, and gazed upon himself. He saw that Count Horace's eyes were somewhat red, but, notwithstanding that, he saw that Count Horace was still a man. He went in search of two large empty trunks which he had put aside, and dragged them one after the other into his chamber; two minutes later he began to pack them.

On the next afternoon the Marquis de Miraval, who strangely enough had omitted that day to cross the lake, although the weather was really beautiful, received two letters,

one of which was brought by the postman, the other by Jacquot, in a new suit of clothes.

The first, written in a fine and steady hand, ran as follows :

“My dear Uncle,—The situation is vacant and at your service. If you have any commands for Vichy, please forward them to Geneva, where I shall pass the night, leaving to-morrow by the express-train, which goes at three o’clock, or, to speak more correctly, at twenty-five minutes past three. Allow me to convey to you my best wishes for your happiness, and the assurance of my unchanging affection.”

The second, hurriedly scribbled, contained these words :

“Monsieur le Marquis,—Unfortunately you spoke the truth. He either did not love at all or else very lightly, since he cannot forgive the woman whom he pretended to love for having dozed during the reading of his paper upon King Apepi. I will leave you to imagine what my daughter thinks of it all ; she has taken the full measure of the man, and a woman no longer loves the man whom she thus measures. I have heard that he left immediately, so you need fear my imprudence no longer. Henceforward nothing can hinder you from writing and revealing to me your secret, or rather, better still, come and tell it to us to-night and dine with us.”

Jacquot carried back the following answer to Madame Véretz :

“Dear Madame,—So I must reveal to you my dreadful secret ! I have an unfortunate passion which I conceal carefully out of respect for my white hairs. Those of my friends who know it have mercilessly made fun of me. With blushes I confess to you that I dote on fishing ! When Madame de Penneville sent me to Lausanne to manage a family affair, I consoled myself for my inconvenience by remembering that Lausanne was near a lake, where I might fish. My first

thought on arriving was to buy fishing-lines and all the other necessary apparatus. I did not dare to fish in your neighbourhood for fear I might be surprised, and that my nephew would laugh at me. I made inquiries, and was told that there was a pretty little place near Evian, in Savoy, full of fish. There is an inn on the shore, so I engaged a room there, where I kept all my equipments, and every morning I crossed the lake to satisfy my passion.

“Since I promised you that I would be as truth-telling as Amen-heb (chief scribe), I will show you how far I was carried away by this mania. I left Lausanne for Ouchy with the sole intention of getting near fish; I forgot so entirely the business which brought me here that I only went to see my nephew twice—one day when it blew, and another when it rained; because there was no fishing on those days. I also declined two most attractive invitations to breakfast, because if I had accepted them I should have given up the pleasure of fishing for two whole days. The lamentable part of it is, that, in spite of my pains, my application, and perseverance, I caught nothing but a few miserable gudgeons. I kept saying to myself: ‘This is too much; I will leave it all.’ But I did not leave it. When I returned to Lausanne, my faith in fish would return, but I believe in them no longer. Thus our illusions vanish like our youth; our path is strewn with them. Nevertheless, yesterday, by some incomprehensible miracle, I did succeed in catching a good-sized eel, who kindly condescended to take my bait—so on that I leave. The honour of my white hairs is secure.

“I beg you, dear madame, to present to your adorable daughter, and also accept for yourself, the most devoted and respectful compliments of the Marquis de Miraval.”

We will not attempt to describe the expression which came over the face of Madame Vézetz as she took in the full meaning of this reply, the cruel embarrassment which she experienced in communicating it to her daughter, or the terrible scene

which that adored angel made for her. Madame Corneuil is less to be pitied than her mother, since, in her misfortune, she has, at least, one resource, that of relieving her mind by the most vehement reproaches, the most violent recriminations, and exclamations such as "Are you not to blame for all this?" It is said that in this century there lived a queen who was very intelligent, very enlightened, full of good sentiments, who exercised a great and rightful influence in affairs of state. It happened, unfortunately, that she was once mistaken, and the fate of a lifetime is sometimes settled in a minute. From that moment she was no longer consulted. The people she recommended were no longer accepted; her august husband said, "I suspect them all—they are my wife's friends." So, having been once mistaken, Madame Vêretz lost all her influence, all her credit. Her daughter will remind her to all eternity that she once made her forego her prey, to chase a phantom with white hair.

When Count Horace de Penneville entered the station at Geneva, impatient to go by the train which leaves not at three o'clock, but at twenty-five minutes past three, in the afternoon, he was greatly astonished to find, seated in a corner of the very carriage which he happened to enter, his great-uncle, the Marquis de Miraval, who remarked to him, as he helped him to stow away carefully all his numberless little parcels under the seat and upon the rack, "My son, I have thought the matter well over, and have come to the conclusion that there is no faith to be put in women who like Apepi one day and dislike him the next."

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